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THE VIRGIN AND CHILD

From a Photograph by Anderson after the fresco by Bernardino Betto (il Pinturicchio)

THE GLORY OF BETHLEHEM

BY

F. W. DRAKE

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PREFACE

THIS little book follows the plan of *The Wondrous Passion* and *The Call of the Lord.* They suggested thoughts for Lent and for Easter. *The Glory of Bethlehem* suggests meditations for Christmas and Epiphany-tide, which emphasize some of the simpler truths of practical belief which gather round the fact of the Incarnation.

No one can really meditate for another. Meditation is the original effort of the soul giving itself alert and expectant to the contemplation of God under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. But sometimes the thoughts of another will serve to stimulate the mind and attune the soul to fuller response to the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, Who through the way of meditation designs to lead us to that sure knowledge and personal apprehension of the things of Jesus, which is the happiness of Christian faith.

The book is divided into sections, which adapt it the more readily for consecutive reading in daily portions, and the short devotions at the end of each section suggest the part which simple prayer plays in gathering up the fruit of every meditation.

To so slender a book on so mighty a theme the words of the author of the Second Book of the Maccabees seem most appropriate: "If I have written well and to the point, this is what I myself desired. But if meanly and indifferently, this is all I could attain unto."

F. W. D.

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THE GLORY OF BETHLEHEM

I

BETHLEHEM

MICAH v. 2–4.

THE Glory of Bethlehem is Jesus, the only-begotten Son of God, Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made Man.

A.

"Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa in the days of Herod the King." It marked the humility and lowliness of the ways of Divine Love, that this little village should be chosen for the supreme manifestation of God upon earth. Bethlehem had a history as old as that of any of the towns of Palestine, but it was an unrecorded story of quiet peace and uneventful happiness. It might claim distinction as the birthplace of David, the great king. But even that honour seemed to bring no

dignity to the village. Neither David in the hour of his own greatness, nor his successors on the throne made any effort to lift Bethlehem out of the simple obscurity in which the shepherd lad had found it. The neighbouring towns of Hebron and Jerusalem absorbed all the political interest of Judah. Bethlehem remained in the peace of its sheepfolds, untouched by the changing crises of Jewish national life, and unknown to the world. The simple pastoral scenes, which are the background of the story of Boaz and Ruth, are typical of the quiet life which Bethlehem preserved unchanged through all the years. It was through the veil of this obscurity that the insight of the prophet descried the coming glory of Bethlehem. "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet, out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." Yet, even so, no signs of special honour gathered about the little city. The Rabbis could turn to this word of prophecy when questioned as to the birthplace of the Messianic King, but the promise was perhaps too indefinite and remained too long unfulfilled for popular expectation to make Bethlehem the centre of its hope. Men might take pride in the antiquity of the village and recall its ancient name, Ephrath; they might speak of the son of Jesse and musingly repeat the promise of

the prophet; the traveller might remember the inn at Bethlehem, the familiar halting-place, from which the journey was made into Egypt; but nothing changed the peace of Bethlehem. The city lay still in its seclusion on the hillside, overlooking the fields below, where night by night the shepherds watched, as David years ago had watched, unconscious of the glory that should be.

Pray that we may offer for God's glory the obscure and simple things of our daily life.

Almighty and Eternal God, Who didst hallow the lowliness of Bethlehem with the glorious birth of Thy Incarnate Son, grant that in steadfast reliance upon Thy power, we may so faithfully tread the ways of obscurity and peace, that our simple lives may be touched with the glory of His Presence, Who with Thee and the Holy Ghost liveth and reigneth one God, world without end.

B.

The fulness of time had come at length, and God's great promise was to be fulfilled, on which the hopes of Israel had always rested. No nation had ever felt itself so surely called of God. At every crisis in its history this choice and election of God had been repeated and confirmed. Abraham, Israel, David—these were the heroes through whom the national hope had received stimulus and guidance.

Above all it was to David, the shepherd of Bethlehem raised by God to the throne of a united and victorious Israel, that the nation looked, as symbolising the unity, the prosperity, and the righteousness which should be the supreme fulfilment of the Messianic Kingdom. But in the certainty of its Divine election the nation forgot the need of holiness for the achievement of the Divine purpose. God had revealed Himself as the Holy God, and the instruments of His choice must be a holy people. Every repeated apostasy led up inevitably to national disaster. It was the work of the prophets at each crisis of national distress to turn the hearts of the people once more towards God, renewing their confidence in the Divine faithfulness, and calling them to recognise in the extremity of their suffering the effective way of Divine purification. Many might fall away, but there was in each crisis a remnant whose faith never faltered, who were drawn nearer to God by each successive discipline of sorrow. These preserved the heart of the nation and afforded hope for the eventual accomplishment of God's purpose in Israel.

The fiercest fire of discipline through which the nation passed was the Babylonian captivity. From that suffering the people emerged purified in heart and purpose, purged of idolatry, and prepared for God. Round the restoration of national life and the rebuilding of the Temple gathered new hopes and new

ideals. A new consciousness that they were God's people moved them to deeper insight into the Divine purpose. They gave themselves, at the call of the prophets, to be more worthy of their vocation. They began to realise their destiny as the chosen missionaries of God's faithfulness and love to the great heathen nations, from whose hands God had so wonderfully delivered them. In this new spirit of humility and self-consecration they looked for the fulfilment of the Divine promise. But the old hope of a temporal world-kingdom could not be abandoned ; their ideals were still shaped by hopes of national conquest. Looking back across the great gulf of the captivity into the past history of their nation, they recalled the promises made to the house of David, and pictured to themselves a Messiah, anointed of the Lord to the supreme kingly office, rising from the royal seed of Bethlehem, who should win new victories over the foes of Israel, and as the viceroy of God inaugurate a kingdom of righteousness, fruitful in material prosperity and fraught with spiritual blessing for all nations.

But the days passed, dangers and difficulties multiplied, and no deliverer came. The Persian domination was succeeded by the Greek supremacy, and deliverance seemed almost a lost hope. Readily the Jews succumbed to the temptations of Greek culture. Loyalty to the Mosaic Law and the established customs of Judaism waned

before the insidious encroachments of Hellenic habits and the tyrannous assaults of the Seleucid kings. Apostasy increased ; the faith of the nation was strained to its utmost. From the agony of the moment men sought relief in forecasting a happy future, when God should at length vindicate the cause of His people, and the reign of righteousness and universal peace should be established. The desolation of the Sanctuary and the wanton profanation of the Temple under Antiochus Epiphanes at length fired the spirit of rebellion. The old priest Mattathias and his sons took up arms in defence of the outraged Law of Moses, and gathered round them the patriots of the nation. Political and religious independence were at length regained. The success of the Maccabean patriots seemed to open once more the door of hope. The sufferings of the period had purged the people, had rallied them round the Law, and had greatly quickened the spiritual life of the nation.

But deliverance was not yet. The Roman dominion succeeded to the Greek. Still the nation bowed beneath the yoke of a foreign conqueror. The secret aspirations of the faithful might be quickened as their sufferings increased, but the silence of prophecy combined with the political failure to distress the faith of many, and to darken the counsel of a nation impatient of the Divine victory. Still they were God's people ; that was their one hope.

Through all their sufferings they held to the belief that God would yet vindicate His promise and bring deliverance to His people. But that deliverance, when it came, came unobserved. It was from Bethlehem, not Jerusalem, that the Saviour came. For, despite all the discipline of their national suffering, designed by God to wean them from their reliance on material things and to turn their thoughts to the deeper truths of the spiritual life, they still looked for an earthly conquest and a temporal kingdom, for political freedom and world-wide empire. The great unknown prophet of the Exile had truly pictured the ideal conqueror as the suffering servant of the Lord. He had seen that self-sacrifice, humility, and love were the only true way of redemption and the appointed means of the Divine victory.

But that ideal vision soon faded from the people's gaze. They had recurred with growing emphasis to the fact of their Divine election, and to their expectation of a warrior-king. It was the work of John the Baptist to sift the nation with his ministry of Baptism. In him prophecy found voice once more. He recalled the people to their ideals of personal holiness, warned them against vain trust in their election, and prepared the way for a spiritual conception of the Messianic kingdom. But when Jesus the Messiah stood in their midst, and Himself proclaimed the advent of His Kingdom, He found no welcome, no recognition, no

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response. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." The Son of David, born in Bethlehem itself, fulfilling all the prophecies of old, was yet unrecognised, because He came in the lowliness and suffering of perfect manhood, not in the splendour and pomp of Divine kingship.

The story of the Messianic Hope in Israel is the tragedy of a people who never learned the lessons of those repeated and severe national chastisements which they received at the hands of God. They knew themselves to be called of God, a peculiar people, a chosen race. Yet they failed to realise their vocation through overweening reliance upon the privilege of their election. Resting securely upon the promised favour of God, they never advanced to meet the successive revelations of the Divine purpose with hearts attuned to obedience and receptive of His Will. Suffering and prosperity alike brought no true vision. Their eyes were still blinded to the light. Their failure is a standing witness to the truth that no nation can rest upon the privilege of its vocation. Be its calling ever so true, and ever so high, there can be no safeguard and no guarantee of its fulfilment, but the spirit of chastened penitence and perseverance in holiness. The downfall of a nation, called to high privilege and endowed with special gifts, is no contradiction of the supremacy and love of God. It is a manifest witness of His Holiness. The God Who rules is a

God of righteousness. He can only use as His instrument a nation continually dedicated to His sole obedience, and moulded to His holiness. It was thus that the Jewish people had failed to grow in dedication and in desire for the fulfilment of God's will, so that when God Himself appeared in the moral beauty of perfect human holiness He was unrecognised, despised and rejected of men.

Yet here was the fulfilment of all that God had promised. The glory of Bethlehem was the glory of the Divine purpose of world-wide victory achieved in the Incarnation of the Son of God. But the victory was a triumph of spiritual conquest, not of temporal or earthly dominion. It was won by love, not by force. It was the victory not of one people over another, but of God over the whole world. Not all at once, by one single act of striking valour, could such a triumph be accomplished. Only by slow processes of gradual revelation, by the ever-growing surrender of men's hearts and wills to the call of the Incarnate, by the lifting of men's minds to the beauty of the Divine ideals disclosed in the life of Jesus, and the gradual quickening of their lives by the grace of His Divine fellowship, could the victory of God be achieved, and the promise of the Messianic kingdom be fulfilled. It should have been the glory of Israel to have been so responsive to the ideals of God, so prepared for the spiritual methods and principles of His

kingdom, that they would have been able at once to recognise in Jesus the marks of His vocation and His Deity. It should have been theirs to acclaim Him as their Saviour, and to have made Him known to the world as the desire of all nations, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Yet "His own received Him not."

But the nation was not wholly untrue to its vocation. There was a small circle of faithful souls to whom the lowly ways of God were not hidden. There were those who "looked for redemption in Jerusalem," men and women just and devout, who were waiting in tranquil confidence for the consolation of Israel, to whom the Holy Ghost had revealed that it was not by might nor by power, but in the ways of lowliness and suffering and love that the Lord's Christ should be made manifest. There were those who waited to welcome the Messiah in the spirit of holiness and faith. "As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His Name, which were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." The Kingdom of the Messiah was to be founded not by conquest of arms, but by spiritual regeneration, by Divine recreation and new birth. This was the glory of Bethlehem. Thus from the stem of Jesse, from the house of David, should the Lord's Anointed rise, "for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a

sign which shall be spoken against, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." Always, through all the ages, would the Son of David thus reveal the heart of nations, and decide the destiny of peoples. He must reign and must put all enemies under His feet. The nation that would make its empire sure, and stand unmoved among all the shocks of time, must rest its hope upon the fulfilment of His will, and by patient continuance in welldoing bear witness to the eternal laws of holiness and love by which God rules the world, and makes it the expression of His glory. It is for us, as we read afresh the story of the Incarnation, to realise in Jesus Christ the fulfilment of God's great purpose for the world, to make His service the inspiration of our national life, to find in His Presence the fulness of joy and in His fellowship the hope of glory.

Pray that in our national life we may be true to the vocation of God.

Almighty and Everlasting God, Who hast made all men for Thy glory and, endowing the nations with peculiar gifts of the Holy Ghost, hast called them to fulfil Thy holy will and to extend Thy kingdom, inspire, we beseech Thee, our nation with such zeal for Thy holiness, that putting away all selfish and worldly ambition, purified by suffering and recalled to Thy obedience, we may not lose the joy of our vocation, but may diligently use Thy manifold gifts to Thy honour and glory, through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

II

THE ANNUNCIATION

S. Luke i. 26–56.

THERE were many in Israel who, in the midst of their quiet and devoted lives, nourished eager hopes of the speedy coming of the Messiah. They could not tell the manner of His coming, but instinctively they felt that all the Divine promises made so frequently to the poor and to the lowly of Israel would find fulfilment when He came. Galilee had its enthusiasts and Jerusalem its bigots, but both in north and south were those whose quiet lives were irradiated by a serene and faithful devotion to the will of God. Of such was Mary, the Virgin of Nazareth, whom God lifted from the seclusion of a humble village home to be blessed above all women, the supreme human instrument of the Divine will for the redemption and regeneration of mankind.

A.

Mary, the lowly Maid of Nazareth, was betrothed to a humble carpenter named Joseph, who was of

the house and lineage of David. Theirs was the simple joy of souls quietly dedicated to the loving service of God. The pure soul of Mary mirrored the Divine purpose, while she was all unconscious of the vocation to which she was being called. In all the surroundings of her girlhood she had found God very near. The sacred story of her own race, on which she loved to linger, had filled her with hopes of the great deliverance which God would work for His own people. She had prayed for the coming of that day of redemption with a selflessness which sought only the accomplishment of the Divine will. The manner of its fulfilment was hidden from her, but of the power and faithfulness of God she had no doubt. And Joseph shared her devotion. The steadfastness of his love, the holiness of his life, the humility and eagerness of his faith, offered a sure protection for the lowliness, the purity, and the single-hearted zeal of Mary. In the stillness of her heart she pondered the ways of God and sought to know His will. In simplicity and faith she waited upon God, offering her life for His glory in the lowly obediences of home, in the quiet oblation of her will, in the happy innocence of pure devotion, and in the fellowship of constant prayer. And thus at length there broke upon her prayers the sudden disclosure of the Will of God. Gabriel, the angel of the Divine Presence, "came in unto her and said, Hail, thou that art highly

favoured. The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women." And when she was greatly troubled at the saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this might be, the angel said unto her: "Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favour with God. And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a Son, and shalt call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end."

There was no room for doubt. It was the Divine promise of a Son, Who should recover the lost glories of Israel and establish the long-looked-for kingdom of righteousness. But that she should be the channel of this deliverance seemed impossible. But now her alarm was stilled, and she was not afraid to ask: "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" And then the wonder was revealed. It was not to be a child born under the wonted conditions of human parentage. Divine intervention would solve the impossibility of which Mary was conscious. God waited on her willing acceptance. Miracle there should be, a Divine enhancement of all the creaturely powers of human motherhood, but no annihilation of the freewill of the creature. It must be the ready response of humanity to the supreme Will of God, an offering

made in pure faith and holy obedience. "The angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee. Therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." This was beyond the full understanding of Mary, but it was the clear call of God Himself. In all the simple experiences of her life she had never disobeyed that call. All the sure instincts of a life of holy obedience and hallowed trust prompted the brave response: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy word."

God had found the willing obedience of a holy creature which He sought. Out of that very race of sinful men whom He had come to redeem, God had chosen one to be the sacred channel of redemption. Mary could know little yet of that great vocation to which she was so faithfully giving herself, but her obedience was wholehearted. It was not the splendid enthusiasm of a moment; it expressed the spirit and habit of a life of innocence and faith. Her holiness, her heroism, her humility ensured the fulfilment of her creaturely part in the Divine miracle. It was the work of the Holy Ghost, the Giver of Life, to sanctify in the womb that human nature which in its sinlessness was to prove the starting-point of a race recreated in holiness. There could be no transmission of sin in that sacred

humanity, in the creation of which the Holy Spirit of God took so transcendent a part. The holiness of Mary interposed no barrier to the sanctifying creative power of God. "The power of the Highest shall overshadow thee, therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." So Mary gave herself to the fulfilment of the Divine Will, heroic in her obedience and humble in her trust. The miracle of the Holy Conception was achieved. A tabernacle was found amongst men for the eternal Son of God.

Pray that we may share in those blessings which the Son of Mary has won for us by His Incarnation.

We beseech Thee, O Lord, pour Thy grace into our hearts, that, as we have known the Incarnation of Thy Son Jesus Christ by the message of an angel, so by His Cross and Passion we may be brought unto the glory of His Resurrection, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

B.

However incomplete may have been her vision of the future, the Blessed Virgin must have been able to realise the sacrifice of human hopes which she had made at the call of Divine love, and could forecast some of the perils of grave misunderstanding to which she was exposing her life of blamelessness. She could only throw herself upon the care of God, knowing that the Divine wisdom would fully justify

His ways and protect His servants from all harm. But only a will of resolute obedience and a heart of holy faith could accept such a way of perpetual sacrifice. It was no blind obedience. True it was that she could not yet picture each step in that path of growing self-abandonment and sacrifice. But as each fresh call for sacrifice was revealed, she made loyal and willing response. Each new obedience, whatever its demand might prove to be, was already implicitly offered and fulfilled in the words, " Behold the handmaid of the Lord." The dignity of so high a call flashed upon her, only to deepen her humility and to bend her to a readier obedience to the untried ways of the Divine command.

The obedience of Mary is the glory of womanhood. First among women, the Blessed Virgin holds out to all her sisters the one hope of human happiness—conformity to the will of God. That is the secret of all human greatness. That is the way of blessedness, the way of progress and of bliss. In all the secret impulses of her heart, in all the inner desires of her soul, in all the hidden purposes of her mind, she waited upon God. Prayer had brought her near to Him. God was a reality to Mary. She lived in His presence. His Will was her supreme and sovereign good. She waited only for vision, and when the vision came, with its surpassing call, its unfathomed responsibilities, she

immediately obeyed, giving herself up gladly to the Divine Will, losing herself in the achievement of God's purpose.

"Behold the handmaid of the Lord." This is the fulfilment of every human life. No one can ever be called to a vocation so unique and glorious as hers. Our Lady must ever stand apart in the supreme dignity of her high vocation. Yet there is no life which may not be touched with the glory of her obedience. There is no will which may not be made as effectual as hers to fulfil the sovereign purpose of God. Just as the Virgin, although she could not see all the way by which she should eventually be led, yet gave herself unreservedly to be the handmaid of God's Will, so is it with our own vocation. We may not at the moment realise more than the certainty of the Divine call. We too must trust God to make His way clear, and to enable us to be sufficient at each stage for the fulfilment of what He wills.

"Be it unto me according to Thy word." To accept God's word with the obedience of complete surrender is to share in the blessing of Mary. "My mother and My brethren are these which hear the word of God and do it." It was through the disobedience of Eve that Satan had won his first victory over man. It was now through the obedience of Mary that the birth of the Second Adam was accomplished. In Him the final victory over Satan was won for all mankind. Disobedience was the root of all sin, the

source of Satan's strength. But now through fellowship with the Incarnate Son of God men received power to become the sons of God and to follow in the steps of His holy obedience.

"Be it unto me according to Thy word." In Eve, suspicion and distrust of God's word separated man from God, alienated his will, perverted his mind, corrupted his desires, and dimmed his vision of God. In Mary, faith in God's word made a lowly virgin the channel of Divine salvation, through whose Son by the obedience of His perfect humanity the whole world was renewed in holiness, enriched in power, and restored to fellowship with God.

It is ours to follow Mary and to find God by our obedience. Every act of obedience is a renewal of fellowship with God, for God is a perpetual communion to the soul that does His Will. For this is the command of love and obedience which Christ, the Son of Mary, has laid upon us: "If ye love Me, keep My commandments." And this is the promise of Divine fellowship which He, Who is the Amen, the Faithful Witness, and the Truth, has made to those who love and obey: "If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him and make Our abode with him."

Pray that we may by our obedience and love of Jesus share in the blessings of Mary.

O Almighty God, Who by the message of an angel didst will that Thy eternal Word should take flesh in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, grant that we who do believe her to be indeed the Mother of God may please Thee by our obedience, and following her in purity and in love for Jesus may through the might of His life-giving Incarnation be enabled to attain to fellowship with her and all Thy Saints in the everlasting joy of Thy eternal kingdom, through the merits of her Son Jesus Christ our Lord, Who with Thee and the Holy Ghost liveth and reigneth, one God, world without end.

C.

"And behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible." "And Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste into a city of Judah and entered into the house of Zacharias and saluted Elisabeth." At such a moment of deep feeling and grave experience God knew how the heart of Mary would long for the solace of another woman's sympathy and understanding. The angel spoke to her of her cousin Elisabeth, for whom God had wrought so wondrously. The child-bearing of Elisabeth was a

proof of the power of God to do that which was beyond the expectation of man. And it was a sign of the wisdom of God in preparing the way for the coming of His own Son into the world. Mary's faith would be strengthened both by this evidence of the Divine power to enhance the natural faculties of human life, and by this witness to the eternal purpose of God, Who had already made hidden preparation for the heralding of His Son when He should come in the flesh. Elisabeth's own experience of the marvellous ways of God would make her a ready sympathiser with the secret of Mary. Mary found immediate relief in interpreting the message of the angel as a command to visit Elisabeth, and there in the quiet home in the hill-country of Judæa she found herself greeted by her aged cousin as "the mother of my Lord." The blessing which had come from the angel was heard now upon human lips. "Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believeth, for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord." Thus Mary, conscious of a new relation to God created by her acceptance of the Divine Will, and aware of the momentous results of her surrender,

found support in the sympathy of one to whom God had already revealed the mysteries of His purpose. In the intimate converse of two souls who have each experienced the lovingkindness and favour of God, there is the mutual strengthening of faith, the deepening of personal surrender, and the quickening of spiritual insight and of hope. So God confirms our human fellowship in those solemn moments, when we are most closely bound to Him in renewed allegiance of obedience and of love. So Mary came to Elisabeth, bearing God within her. And at the salutation of Mary the unborn babe leaped with joy within her cousin's womb, "and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost." And as the inspired welcome of the aged woman with its words of solemn benediction fell upon the ears of the young Virgin-Mother, the joy of Mary in her Lord broke forth in the glad song of the *Magnificat*.

In Mary's song of praise there rises the adoring gratitude of the lowly soul for the unspeakable gift of the Divine condescension. In radiant and earnest tones of thankfulness and trust Mary voices the overflowing joy of the human heart as it leaps to the understanding of this supreme revelation of Divine love. The praise of God is the theme of the thankful soul. In the glory of God all self is lost. The joy of human life is the joy of a salvation which God has stooped to accomplish upon earth, taking up into the counsels of His love the lowly

obedience of His handmaiden. In her obedience shall all generations share and call her blessed. For the might of God has made her great and equipped her for her sublime task. His holiness has found a mirror in her purity, and in her His Holy Name is glorified. And not in her only. In all generations those who reverence and fear His Name share in the loving-kindness of the Almighty. All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep His covenant and His testimonies. To them He shows His majesty and might, upholding them with His arm, while He humbles the proud to the dust. The hungry and the humble are His care. To these He brings satisfaction; these He uplifts from their lowliness, making them sit together in heavenly places. And thus God brings the promised salvation to His people, and fulfils the hope of Israel, according to the multitude of His tender mercies, in the lowly coming of His own Son, born of a woman, made under the law. So the glory of God is His lowliness, and the supreme manifestation of God is made in the creaturely weakness of human nature.

Here is the joy of human life, that it can rise through the Incarnation to the realisation of the sovereign majesty of God revealed in the condescension of Bethlehem. And the song of praise which rises from every heart to God, each soul's *Magnificat*, is just its adoration of the splendour and glory of the

Almighty, manifested under the lowly conditions which surround each human life, and its glad acceptance of the blessedness which belongs to the soul that gives itself entirely to fulfil the Will of God. So this *Magnificat* has become, in the services of the Church, the evening hymn of the Incarnation, in which the whole Church daily raises its glad pæan of praise for the wonder of the Word made flesh, celebrating the blessedness of Mary, the ever-Virgin Mother of God, and joyfully thanking God for the glory of its own vocation, as Christ-bearer to a sinful world.

The Collect of the Feast of the Visitation.

> O God, Who didst cause the most holy Virgin Mary, Mother of Thy only begotten Son, to visit blessed Elisabeth for their mutual consolation, grant us to be consoled continually by His visitation and protected by His power against all adversities, through the same Thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end.

III

THE NATIVITY

S. Luke ii. 1–20.

THE little streets of peaceful Bethlehem were stirring with the sounds of unusual concourse. The census which Cæsar had ordered had filled the quiet city with visitors, who had travelled far to reach the home of their fathers, that their names might be enrolled on the Roman tribute-list. It had been a toilsome task to many, a difficult interference with work, an irksome obedience to the hated government of Rome ; but it offered a happy chance of renewing many friendships, and a spirit of glad fellowship reigned over the groups of friends as they met after many years of absence. There were family histories to be recounted, old scenes to be recalled, fresh hopes to be aroused, as the past glories of Bethlehem, with its great promises to the house of David, were revived.

A.

The city was filled to its utmost capacity as the watchman stood at the gates on the evening before

the enrolment, looking along the dusty road at the figures of a man and woman hastening to reach the city before darkness fell. Joseph and Mary, of the house and lineage of David, were coming for the enrolment. The journey had proved longer than they had hoped, and Mary was travel-tired and weary as Joseph helped her through the thronged streets, seeking shelter for the night. It was too late. Every house was full, and Joseph's heart grew anxious for Mary as door after door was closed to his request. Even the karavanserai was crowded. There was no room for them in the inn. But there was the hollow cave cut into the rock behind the inn, used now for a stable. That would supply at least the needed shelter, where none else was to be found. And there Joseph led Mary and bade her rest. It was not the place which he could wish for such a time as this. But there was no friend to whom he could turn. He was too poor and too unknown to have influence with anyone in the city. After all, he was but obeying God. It must be the ordering of God. The ways of the Divine choice were beyond man's understanding. God must have chosen this humble birthplace for His Son. And so, with reverent care and calm devotion, Joseph heaped the clean straw for Mary's couch, while from their stall the beasts turned wondering eyes upon their visitors. So darkness fell, and in the stillness of the night the promise of the angel was

fulfilled. Mary brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and laid Him in the manger. The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.

Pray that we may have fellowship with the Incarnate and daily grow in grace.

Almighty God, Who hast given us Thy only begotten Son to take our nature upon Him and to be born of a pure Virgin, grant that we being regenerate and made Thy children by adoption and grace may daily be renewed by Thy Holy Spirit, through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the same Spirit, ever one God, world without end.

B.

Long years ago to David, the shepherd boy, the call of God had come as he watched his flock in the fields of Bethlehem, and ever since that day a glory of hope and consecration had hallowed the simple shepherd's craft in Israel. And now again, as the little city slept in peace, the shepherds were watching their flocks by night. Their quiet, uneventful life had been touched with the stir of the Roman enrolment, as they had seen the long streams of people making their way into Bethlehem. And now, in the stillness of the night, their thoughts played round the strange providence of God towards His people. Here, in the very city from which the

promised Deliverer should spring, the enrolment sought to fix more firmly that yoke of Roman domination which the Messiah should break. Yet the promises were clear. Their simple hearts recalled them, as they encouraged one another with the far-off hopes of future deliverance. God was faithful. He might wait, but He could not forget. In earlier days such a decree of enrolment might have kindled a flame of passionate resistance, which under the leadership of some heroic patriot would have opened a new vision of national liberty. But there had been no sign of resistance nor uprising now. The nation obeyed in sullen silence, powerless to rebel. And all the families of the house of David would register themselves quietly at the bidding of the foreigner, that the Roman tribute might be the more carefully exacted. The shepherds themselves would go in on the morrow to take their part in the enrolment. It seemed a fresh denial of those great hopes, which the freedom of the hills and fields and long watching under the open skies had so inevitably fostered.

But, even as they spoke, a new wonder broke upon their eyes and filled their hearts with fear. Out of the very darkness before them shone a bright ray of light, revealing an angel of God, who turned to them and said: "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in

the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." Thus were their fears belied. This, then, was God's messenger. God's promise to the house of David had found wondrous fulfilment even in the moment of deepest gloom. And the message of the angel was suddenly confirmed by the chorus of angelic praise which broke the silence of the skies. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will." And these men of good will gave themselves faithfully to the joy and wonder of this new revelation of God's mercy and power. With the gladness of the angels' song ringing in their ears, they made their way into the city. "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us."

Thus, before the first Christmas dawn had fully broken, the shepherds were knocking at the stable door, and the Virgin Mother welcomed the first simple worshippers at the shrine of the Incarnate. Joseph held his lantern by the manger and showed them the Holy Child, in Whom they wonderingly saw the agelong promise of God fulfilled. The reverent awe of the shepherds, as they bowed in the darkness before the mystery of God made Man, was the earnest of that adoration which through all the ages should glorify the lives of those in whose

hearts God hath shined to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

It was little that the shepherds could know of the mystery before which they bowed. But in leading them, first of all men, to the manger-throne, God proclaimed the blessing which waits upon the obedience and faith of the simple-hearted. It is the adoration of God which alone satisfies all the truest instincts of man and opens to his gaze the vision of reality. God may reveal Himself with different degrees of fulness to different men. Adoration realises that there is always a grandeur and a greatness in God's Being that transcends revelation. Worship, therefore, while it gives exercise to all the powers of man's intelligent apprehension of God, gathers up also all those instincts of faith which are too deep for conscious expression, and lays the whole creature prostrate before the majesty and love of the Creator. It was this offering of worship which the shepherds made, as they knelt in wonder before the Holy Child—an adoration which, simple as it was in its immediate comprehension of the new mystery of God's revelation, yet brought their lives into fresh contact with the majestic Being of God Himself, and devoted the energies of their service afresh to His obedience.

It is in this way that adoration glorifies human life. It calls into play all the faculties of the soul, leads them off from all interests and thoughts of

self, and centres them upon God. In the infinite treasures of God the soul finds a new awakening of hope which had begun to falter, a fresh revelation of powers which had not yet been realised, a new glory and gladness which will inspire life with new ideals of service and obedience. In these ways the worship of God enriches human life. The Incarnation stimulates and exalts worship to its highest, because it both enhances human powers to their perfection and brings God into closest fellowship with man. The ideal of worship is not reached where God is viewed only afar off in the sublime heights of His eternal majesty, but where His infinite greatness is realised in the simplicity of His incarnate approach to human life, in the intimacy and condescension of His continual nearness, and in the veiled splendour of His sacramental fellowship. Of this nearness the shepherds were the first humble witnesses. Their worship was the promise of a deeper reverence and adoration, which should henceforth dignify human nature and glorify God Himself, by drawing closer together those ties of affection and trustful service, with which the creature was bound to the Creator.

The manger was not only the centre of human worship, it was the centre of angelic worship too. To the angels the Incarnation was a wonder and a mystery as well as to men. Their high intelligences had knowledge of many secrets which the feebler

mind of man could not penetrate. But even to them the mind of God was not fully revealed, and in the Incarnation God made a new self-disclosure of the Divine Being to the angels as well as to men. It was a mystery which with reverent worship they "desired to look into," revealing as it did to their clear understandings new depths of humility, love, and condescension in the Divine Being Whom they adored. To them had been entrusted the first heralding of the Incarnate God. And now, with the shepherds who had obeyed the angelic summons, were angels themselves worshipping at the manger. As they took unselfish joy in this new act of God, and bowed themselves in deepest adoration before the Divine majesty, which to their eyes was ever manifest beneath the new garb of human lowliness which now their Creator deigned to wear, they dedicated themselves to those new ministries of manifold service on behalf of sinful mankind which the Incarnation would open up, and prepared to follow with adoration and obedient service the way of the Incarnate, as He took upon Him the suffering experience of sinless human life. Wherever Jesus was, in the experiences of His manhood, angels were about Him. It must have been their continual wonder that He asked from them no other services than those which they were wont to render to all the sons of men in their hours of need. It was a new vision of humanity which the angels

saw in Jesus. Henceforward they realised in a new way that in serving men they served Jesus Himself, and their service, always obedient, was inspired with a new gladness and a fresh understanding. We too, like the angels, seek always to recognise and adore the Deity of Jesus, however lowly be the manifestation of His activities of love, and would imitate the joyousness of their ministries of service to those who, by His grace, have been made heirs of salvation, realising in truth that in serving others we are serving Him.

Make an act of praise to Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God.

> O Lord, the only begotten Son Jesu Christ, O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, I praise Thee, I bless Thee, I worship Thee, I give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory. I adore Thee in the lowliness of Thy coming, in the beauty of Thy holiness, in the power of Thy Presence. I bow down before Thee in the might of Thy all-conquering Majesty, Lord of Lords and King of Kings, ruling over the hosts of heaven, reigning in love over the nations of the earth, revealing Thyself in Thy incarnate glory to the hearts of the faithful. Worthy art Thou to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and blessing.

C.

And as the shepherds worshipped, Joseph watched. His was the part to guard the sacred Child, tend

the Virgin Mother, and keep fast the secret of God. The difficulty of Joseph's task is the difficulty of those who have committed to their guardianship to-day all that is dear to the Heart of God. God still entrusts to us men the guardianship of His honour, the stewardship of His loving bounty, the care of His secrets. The high and mysterious vocation of Joseph is shared by all those who make the interests of Jesus their own. God commits His own Son to our protection. He places Him in our care.

Most sacred of all the trusts which God gives to men is the guardianship of Jesus on His earthly altar-throne, which has been committed to the priesthood of His Church. Every altar is a manger where the Incarnate lies, over which a Joseph guards. The protection of Jesus is the highest privilege of the priesthood. In all the economy of the Incarnation there is nothing that bears more signal witness to the lowliness of the Divine condescension and the fulness with which God trusts Himself to the care of His chosen, than the sacramental Presence of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. The safeguarding of that mystery is the special work of the priesthood, but the work of S. Joseph is shared by all those who love Jesus. For to them the Incarnate gives Himself, to them He trusts His grace and His truth. Each communicant has to safeguard and protect Jesus in the lowliness of His sacramental gift, to prepare by

discipline and sacrifice for His coming, to keep Him in the home of his heart from harm and profanation, to watch over His interests, and to spread His influence.

We come back to the manger scene at Bethlehem to realise that it is not merely the picture of a supreme moment in the history of God's dealings with man, but the type and symbol of that perpetual intimacy of the Incarnate with mankind, the privileges and wonders of which are now the daily experience of every disciple. It dignifies our life wonderfully to regard it as a vocation to champion and defend the holiness of God, to vindicate the ways of the Incarnate, to prepare the world for Jesus. For such a work we need the preparation of S. Joseph. Our ears must be open to the angelic message, our faith ready to accept the great purposes of the Divine counsel, our wills disciplined for sacrifice, and our life trained to ways of devotion, humility, and obedience. And then the joy of S. Joseph will be ours, the joy of unbroken fellowship with Jesus. Who can measure the gladness which filled the life of S. Joseph through the years in which he watched the holy childhood of Jesus, tending the Virgin Mother with unselfish devotion, guarding her from all harm, shielding her from the malice of evil tongues, waiting with expectant obedience upon the Will of God? May it be ours to fulfil with like devotion and glad faith the voca-

tion with which God has blessed us, who are called to be the guardians of Jesus in the life of His Church to-day.

Think of the Guardianship of Jesus which God has entrusted to us in our daily life.

Recall the ways in which we can protect the interests of Jesus. In the home—by love, sympathy, cheerful obedience, clean words, kind thoughts, helpful service, regularity in prayers and Bible reading. In the world of work and pleasure—by diligent work, high ideals, kind words, courtesy, faithfulness, by care for the weak and helpless, by tenderness to the shy and the ignorant, by protecting the innocent, by purity, by restraint in pleasure and amusement, by adorning the doctrine of Christ our Saviour in all things. In the world of public affairs—by open championship of all that is holy and honest and good and true, by frank confession of belief in Jesus, by bold defence of all the interests of the Church, and careful avoidance of all religious persecution. In the life of the Church—by careful and regular use of the means of grace, by reverent speech about all holy things, by earnest study of the Faith, by kind encouragement of all who are seeking to know Jesus, by implicit obedience to spiritual authority, by giving help in teaching and visiting, by bringing the bright and steadfast influence of a Christian life to bear upon all the duties of the world.

IV

THE SON OF GOD

S. John i. 1–14.

IT cannot surprise us that the Incarnation of the Son of God transcends our full understanding. God must always be beyond our comprehension. The fact that we are made in His image gives us an affinity of sympathy and intelligence which enables us to approve and to adore the ways of God. But, however profound an understanding and insight may be given to those who love Him, His ways will ever be above us and beyond our grasp. Over Creation itself there hangs a mystery for the reverent thinker. It is not only that we cannot conceive its method, but we wonder at the revelation which it gives of God Himself. There is a restraint, a self-limitation imposed by God upon His own almighty power in creating man with the gift of free will, which suggests unexpected and unfathomable mysteries in the Being of God.

It is that same element of restraint and humility that meets us again in the Incarnation. Our difficulties of apprehension arise both from our ignorance

of God and from our ignorance of man. Jesus Christ the Incarnate reveals to us both God and man; God in His lowliness, man in his highest dignity. God had promised to the world the coming of a Deliverer. Even the Jews, for all the fulness of prophecy, had not realised that the Deliverer would be, must be, God Himself. Had they known what deliverance really meant, they would have realised that no one who was merely man would be sufficient for such a task. It was not till deliverance had actually been wrought, that they could understand the true work of the Messiah and were prepared to recognise His Deity. It was to a few only, and to them imperfectly, that the truth of His Person could be revealed during His earthly ministry. To Mary and Joseph most fully of all, to the Apostles before the Resurrection, with very imperfect conviction, at moments of special insight, was Jesus known as Divine. Yet to us, who have the story of Christ's life before us, who have been taught by the experience of ages, reinforced by our own intimate fellowship with Jesus, who have been instructed in the Faith of the Church universal and have been illumined by the Holy Ghost, the figure of Jesus Incarnate stands before us in the true glory of perfect Deity.

A.

The idea of the Incarnation is neither easy nor self-evident. It is only with effort and painstaking care that we can realise to ourselves the true conditions of an act so surpassing all human experience, so startling in its humility, so overwhelming in its results upon human life, so wonderful in its revelation of eternal love.

Jesus, the Son of God, took upon Him human nature in the fulness of its truth and perfection. Mankind as a whole is gathered up in Him. In the womb of the Virgin Mary Christ took upon Him not merely this or that characteristic of man, but human nature in its entire and perfect fulness. He is the ideal, universal Man, expressing in their purity and truth the whole sum of those characteristics and qualities which constitute manhood. Herein He differs from each one of us. For on the one hand, our personality is human and not Divine. To say that Jesus Incarnate represents the whole race of man in its fulness is not to say that He is incarnate in the race as a whole. The centre of our personal being is human, not Divine, touched indeed with Divine power through fellowship with the Eternal Son of God, godlike when it attains to the fulness of its destiny in holiness and power, partaker of Divine sanctification and influence, but

always finite and human even in its perfection, always creaturely, never actually infinite nor Divine. And, on the other hand, we are single individuals, not ideal representatives of the fulness of manhood. Each has his own separate and individual characteristics. At the best each is but a partial expression of what humanity at its highest and fullest can achieve. We share in the true glory of perfect manhood, we are not the full expression of it. But in Christ, as there was all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, so without impairing the truth and perfection of either nature there was the fulness of human nature taken up into union with His Divine Person. He was thus what we can never be, the recapitulation, the summary, the representative of entire manhood in all its fulness and width of capacity and power and goodness.

For this reason S. Paul called Christ the second Adam. S. Paul regarded Adam as the first man, through whom there passed to all his descendants a distinct unity of nature. He was the first head and representative of mankind. But the nature which he transmitted was not the unsullied manhood which he had received from God. It had suffered deterioration through his experience. Through him there passed on to his successors certain hereditary marks of evil tendency, which no human goodness nor effort could remove. This moral weakness of human nature, as we know it,

is a fact of universal experience. The truth remains the same whether the familiar name Adam represents a single individual, or whether it stands for all those who had reached a certain stage of development. As soon as in the progress of development the animal organism in any place had attained to that height of self-consciousness which is the distinctive mark of man, there lay before him the free choice of two paths. He could take the upward path of conscious effort, restraint, and obedience, or the downward path of sensual satisfaction and animal indulgence. Had man chosen the upward path of obedience and unbroken response to the call of his highest spiritual nature, there would have been a steady, gradual course of increasing spiritual perfection, in which the material and lower nature would have been more and more obedient to the spiritual, and would have been transfigured by its glory. Then in due course God would have revealed Himself in this obedient humanity to lead on the race to its glorious consummation of perfect fellowship with God. But man allowed himself to choose the downward path—a wilful, deliberate choice, the moral results of which have been transmitted from generation to generation, so that the very springs of human character have been tainted at the fountain head. Human history has become not the story of an unbroken, steady advance, but the record of a chequered and faltering development,

a story marked by unexpected failures, repeated deterioration, and a universal sense of struggle and defeat in the highest realm of moral effort.

In Christ, the new Representative of mankind, God made use of the solidarity of human nature to new purpose. That very unity of race, which had proved the ruin of our manhood, God now used as the channel of our deliverance and restoration. In Christ God recreated mankind. A new principle of holiness, a new power of obedience, a new capacity of goodness are revealed in the life of man. Christ became the progenitor of a new manhood, through Whom the old race by spiritual regeneration might derive a new life, which should work and thrive and spread, driving out the corruption of the old manhood, till the whole was redeemed, and mankind was brought to that perfection and glory for which it was created.

Recall the words in which S. Paul speaks of Christ as the Second Adam.

> We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom we have now received the atonement. Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned . . . therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many

were made sinners, so by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous.

As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.

B.

The Manhood of Jesus is real and true. What is truly and wholly human is not effaced nor impaired by personal union with the Godhead. It has been always difficult to realise this. Heresy after heresy, repeated through the ages, arose through failure to recognise the fulness and completeness of the humanity which Christ assumed. While He was perfect God, He was also perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. There was nothing lacking in His human nature due to the unique character of His Virgin-birth. There was no characteristic quality inherent in perfect human nature which Jesus failed to receive, when He was conceived of the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary. And that human nature thus received passed through the normal experiences of human growth and development. The growth of all His human faculties was seen under conditions of perfect response to the energies of the Holy Spirit. That is the ideal of all true human development, which can only achieve the Divine purpose by obedient co-operation with the indwelling Spirit of God.

There was in Jesus a real growth alike in bodily powers, in mental apprehension, and in spiritual capacity. At each stage of His manhood there was nothing wanting to complete the development of body, mind, and soul, which was fit and appropriate to that age. The Divine consciousness of Jesus was at no point allowed to interfere with His true human development. Nowhere did Christ use His Divine powers to lessen the strain which obedience, suffering, and faith put upon His truly human faculties. The experiences which the Gospels record, of repeated prayer, of frequent want, of sorrow, astonishment, and pain, of obedient dependence upon the will of the Father, of tender sympathy, of righteous anger, of love and happiness and joy in human fellowship—all these speak of the reality of that manhood which Jesus bore. The title which Jesus most often used of Himself was "the Son of Man." Thus while He recalled a title of Messianic promise, He sought to emphasize the unique relationship in which He stood to the human race as representative and universal Man.

But while that humanity which Jesus bore was indeed real and true, and like that which we to-day know to be ours, there was also an unlikeness, a difference between the actual experiences of our humanity and His. The humanity of Jesus was sinless, perfect, and universal. In those three ways we recognise how the manhood of Jesus transcended

ours. Christ took humanity, not as it had been tainted by man's sin, but in its ideal goodness and perfect purity. The Holy Ghost in the womb of the Virgin Mary ensured that. Christ thus represented humanity as it was in the ideal of God. It was not a mere restoration. It was an actual enrichment of humanity, which this union with the Person of God established. In Christ God recreated mankind. God alone could make a new beginning. He made it for man in Jesus. That fellowship with God, which in Adam had begun to be realised and had been preserved in its purity for so short a while, was achieved in Christ permanently and in its completeness. The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.

Pray that we may follow the example of the perfect Man, Christ Jesus.

Almighty God, Who hast given Thine only Son to be unto us both a sacrifice for sin and also an ensample of godly life, give us grace that we may always most thankfully receive that His inestimable benefit, and also daily endeavour ourselves to follow the blessed steps of His most holy life, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

C.

So clear and manifest are the marks of the true humanity of Christ that many seek for no other explanation of that beautiful life than that which

ideal and perfect manhood can offer. But such a view satisfies neither the facts which the Gospels present nor the instinctive promptings of the human heart. Jesus indeed is perfect Man; but He is also perfect God. In becoming Man He did not become another person. He retains unchanged His Divine Personality. How it could come to pass that two whole and perfect natures, each with its own separate endowments, could be united in one Personality, must remain a mystery to us. We can only observe narrowly the characteristics of each as we find them in the story of His life, recognising their reality and truth, without seeking to explain the way in which their perfect union has been made possible.

The evidences of the Godhead of Jesus meet us in the very earliest and simplest record of His life. Apart from the mystery of Bethlehem—which, if we may judge from the Gospel of S. Mark, does not seem to have been one of the themes of the earliest mission preaching—there are elements in the story of Christ's life and teaching which the theory of manhood carried to its highest development will not satisfy. It is true that the power of a pure and perfect human soul, at every moment responsive to the Mind and Will of God, is beyond our experience. But in Christ we recognise an authoritativeness of teaching, a claim to unique relationship with God the Father, a knowledge both of God and of man, a power

over the forces of nature, a mastery over human souls, and a confident assertion of the powers both of sovereign and of judge, which no conceivable stage of development along the lines of mere human nature will explain. He is more than man; He is God.

True it is that the difficulty is increased for many because He would never say, in terms of brief affirmation, "I am God," or "I am the Son of God." It was the difficulty which the first disciples experienced. But Jesus knew what was in man. Men were not ready for such sudden revelation. It may well be that Jesus was guided by the desire not to embarrass men's hold upon the unity of the Godhead at that early stage. He knew that the days of His earthly life were not the only moments of Divine revelation. He had the future upon which He could rely. His own witness was not meant to stand by itself, apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. At the risk of being immediately misunderstood, He left it to the working of the Holy Spirit upon the minds and souls of men to reveal the things of Jesus and to make clear His Deity. He could not crystallise into one simple and startling phrase that which should gradually be learned through experience and the teaching of the Holy Spirit. Yet it was because "He made Himself the Son of God," and would not deny the charge before Caiaphas or Pilate, that He was

crucified. There were those, therefore, even in His lifetime, who bore witness to His Divine claims. It is only by an uncritical mutilation of the Gospels, or a prejudiced and perverse study of their teaching, that the Deity of Jesus can be set aside.

And because the Son of Mary was the Son of God, a full and true revelation of God was possible in His life, and effectual atonement could be wrought by His death. "No man hath seen God at any time. He Who is in the bosom of the Father declared Him." Only God could truly reveal God. Only God could fully redeem man. The mystery of the Incarnation is just the mystery of the unfathomable love of God. It was love which brought God from heaven. Jesus is Love incarnate. We may wonder, indeed, at the lowliness of His coming, but we cannot doubt that the great marvel of the Incarnation is the condescension of the eternal Son of God, Who, being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men.

Pray that the Deity of Jesus may be more widely acknowledged in the world to-day.

Eternal Father, Who hast sent Thy Son Jesus Christ to reveal to the world the message of Thy love, and to redeem mankind from sin by the infinite merits of His atoning death, bless Thy Church to-day, that by holiness and faith it may

bear effective witness to the Godhead of our blessed Redeemer, and may so manifest in its life the power of His Deity that the day of His coming may be hastened and the triumph of His kingdom be accomplished in the power of the Spirit, Who with Thee and the same Jesus Christ Thy Son ever liveth and reigneth, God for ever and ever.

D.

Jesus came to us that we might come to Him. That was the purpose of the Incarnation. The love of God was revealed that it might work mightily upon our lives, and stir our wills to draw near to Him Who had thus drawn near to us. The very method of the Incarnation prepared a way by which the power of God might enter our lives, without destroying the limitations and conditions of that nature in which we had been made. Doubtless men might conceive other ways of Divine revelation than that which God has employed in the redemption of the world through the coming of His Incarnate Son. It is conceivable that Christ might have remained in visible, unascended form, and have continued to minister in tangible bodily presence to those who could come to Him. He might have brought compelling, irresistible pressure to bear upon man's will by a display of sovereign power. He might have given some signal and magnificent witness to the world, and have blazoned

in the sky the glorious message, "God is Love." He might have written with His own hand the story of His life, and made a book the standard of our faith.

Men have conceived such ways of revelation. But none is so appropriate as the way of humility which God has actually chosen in the Incarnation. In the marvel of Bethlehem Jesus was not only revealing Himself to man through the medium of His perfect human life, but He was preparing a way by which the powers of His perfect humanity might be available for the regeneration of mankind throughout all ages. The method which God chose was singularly true and appropriate to the facts and needs of sinful human nature. For, on the one hand, man is conscious of a great destiny, and is buoyed up with the ineradicable hope of progress and fellowship with God. And, on the other hand, in actual experience and practice, he finds himself so weak, and lives on so low a level. He is so uncertain and so sensible of failure. The Incarnation recognises both these sides of human life. Jesus came in human flesh, the absolute fulfilment in His Person of the highest ideals and hopes of men. And He came, not to flash like some splendid meteor before the eyes of men, in inaccessible and peerless brilliance, arousing men merely to the marvel of a perfection which they can never reach, but He came expressly to make His abode with men, to dwell

with them as a new source of strength, to lead men out of failure and weakness up to the heights of realised power and beauty and goodness. The Incarnation was to be the inspiration of all ages, not the admiration of one. The benefits of that Incarnate Presence were to be available for all generations. The treasures of the Gospel were to be shared not only by those who saw the Light of the World in bodily beauty, and heard the glad tidings from His sacred Lips, but by generations yet unborn. To the end of all ages men were to be hallowed by that very Presence, and wrought by sacramental grace into the image of His perfection.

For this great purpose the Incarnation is the hallowing of matter, that it may be the medium of the Divine approach to man. For God would claim the material as well as the spiritual side of human life. For the integrity of human perfection both are seen to be necessary. The perfection of human life lies not in the denial nor destruction of the material or bodily element, but in the obedient co-operation of the body with the spirit. The spiritual is the ruling element in man, and the spirit both realises and expresses itself through the agency of the body. Jesus took a perfect human body and made it the expressive and perfect instrument of the spirit, no longer a hindrance, no longer an enemy, but a willing and subservient handmaid, co-operating in all that is highest and

best. In the consecration of the human body we see the hallowing of the crown of all material creation. Christ took that highest expression of the material, and hallowed it by union with His Divine Person. For thirty-three years He bore it through all the vicissitudes of earthly experience, and then carried it through the gate of death up to the throne of God. The Ascension was the natural sequel of the Incarnation. The mount at Bethany completed what was begun in the manger of Bethlehem. The Ascension was the elevation into new conditions of power and glory of that material Body which Jesus had for ever taken to Himself. It was not the annihilation of matter, not its destruction, but its consecration, its enrichment, its perfection. Jesus is not only God ; He is God made Man. He has a Body. God is Spirit. But Jesus has not put off the glory of that Body which He took of the Virgin Mary for our redemption. There is a Spiritual Body, which now can transcend in its operation and working the ordinary limitation of the experience of this life. His sacred Humanity, risen and ascended, thus gifted with new powers of Spirit, becomes through the operation of the Holy Ghost a new source of sanctification and strength, which can penetrate and permeate the souls of men and give new life to weak humanity.

And just as the Incarnate Life itself is the great and abiding Sacrament, the highest expression of

the Invisible through the limitations of the visible, so the means by which that Incarnate Presence is vouchsafed and the grace of that invisible power is bestowed, are outward and visible ordinances. And these ordinances were not left to man to devise; they were of Christ's own ordinance. Distinctly, emphatically, and definitely, at crucial moments of His life, Jesus Himself, the Incarnate, ordained the two Sacraments of Baptism and Communion to be the visible media of His invisible Presence. These Sacraments are the extension of the Incarnation. The principle of the Sacraments is the principle of the Incarnation. The glory of the Altar is the glory of Bethlehem.

Pray that the sacramental ordinances of Jesus may be increasingly honoured.

O Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, infinite in love and power, Who hast ordained and instituted Holy Sacraments in Thy Church to be the bonds of fellowship whereby we are made partakers of the Divine nature, and to be the means of grace by which our weakness is empowered with the perfection of Thy humanity, grant us so faithfully to approach Thy Sacraments and so diligently to treasure the grace which they bestow, that we may be united to Thee and to one another in the fulness of knowledge and of love, for Thy sake Who with the Father and the Holy Ghost livest and reignest one God, world without end.

V.

THE HOLY NAME

S. Matthew i. 18–21; S. Luke ii. 21; Philippians ii. 5–11

"AND when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, His Name was called Jesus, which was so named of the angel before He was conceived in the womb." The revelation, which had come to Joseph in a dream, had declared both the dignity of Christ's Person and the great work of salvation to which the Child of Mary was called. "That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shall call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins."

A.

The solemn giving of the name accompanied the rite of circumcision, which was the formal token of entrance into the enjoyment of the covenant which God had made with His chosen people. The rite itself, which had been enjoined upon Abraham, the father of the faithful, as the parti-

cular sign of covenant relationship with God, was one well-known to the peoples of the East. To Abraham himself it could not be unfamiliar. Like so many other habits of daily life, which in early days emdodied precautions and practices needful for the health of the individual or the well-being of society, circumcision had been invested with religious sanction and incorporated into the ceremonies of heathen worship. It was this practice which God chose to purify and consecrate by taking it into the religion of His chosen people. It marked the reception of the child into the family of the faithful. It meant the acceptance of the Law, the attainment of privilege, and the assumption of responsibility. And the reality of the personal responsibility which it involved was appropriately marked by the giving of the individual name. Henceforth the child was duly enrolled as a member of the Jewish Church. It was a profession of faith, and a promise of obedience to the whole Law.

In this first submission to the ordinances of the Law, we can recognise the earliest expression of that humility and obedience which marked the perfect surrender of the life of the Incarnate to the Will of the Father. There was no need for His own sake that Jesus should be submitted to the requirements of the Law in this respect. He was eternally One with the Father. He needed no token of covenant relationship with God. The Law was

not needed for His perfection, as it was for the training of sinful men. In their hearts the Law had a discipline to exercise, a conscience of sin to form and educate, a sense of need and moral dissatisfaction to create.

But such a work was not needed in the life of the Sinless. Yet for our sakes Jesus bowed to the humiliation of this initial rite of the Jewish covenant, that He might represent us in the perfect fulfilment of the Will of God. We might expect that He, the Universal Man, representing not this nor that race or age, but summing up in Himself all races and ages of man, might hold Himself free from the limitations of the covenant obligations and duties of any one people, and might dispense with the peculiar religious rites of any individual nation. But no. He set His seal to God's choice of the Jewish people as the special sphere of Divine revelation and the school of holiness for the nations of the ancient world by His acceptance of the Law. His purpose was to fulfil, not to destroy. From the very discipline of the Law, which was "added because of transgressions till the seed should come to whom the promise was made," should that Seed rise, "made under the Law," sinless and perfect in holiness, to redeem men from the curse of the Law. The purpose of its discipline had been fulfilled when the Redeemer Himself submitted in lowly obedience to all its

ordinances. In Him the Law was revealed as holy, and the commandment holy, righteous, and good.

Pray for the spirit of true obedience.

> Almighty God, Who madest Thy blessed Son to be circumcised and obedient to the law for man, grant us the true circumcision of the Spirit, that our hearts and all our members being mortified from all worldly and carnal lusts, we may in all things obey Thy blessed Will, through the same Thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

B.

The obedience of Jesus vindicated the true dignity of the Law, and in His perfection it found fulfilment. The old dispensation of type and shadow was ended, when He, the great Reality Whom it prefigured, accepted the obedience of the Mosaic Law. He revealed the permanent obligation of that obedience to God, which the Law was meant to create and to foster, while He Himself extended the sphere of that obedience, as He made fresh revelation of the supreme Will and Sovereign Love of God. He, the eternal Lawgiver, while He showed by His own life and work the transitoriness of the ritual ordinances of the Law, bore witness by word and deed to the eternal obligation of the moral commands of the Law. It was the revela-

tion of the holiness of God. The new kingdom might have its spiritual glories and its profound claims, which touched depths of capacity and feeling in the human soul, which the Mosaic Law could neither recognise nor quicken, but it was based upon the moral character of God and the sacred obligations of human obedience and mutual fellowship, of which the Decalogue is the true and abiding expression.

The value of the Law was that it trained men's wills to obedience, and awoke in those who were true to its ideals a sense of weakness and a desire for higher things. It was, indeed, an act of wonderful condescension that He who was sinless, Who could have no experience of moral weakness, should give Himself to the obedience of the Law. But we can realise how the obedience in which He was thus trained, developed the powers of His human will, and helped to satisfy those instincts and desires for fellowship with God which were proper to His perfect Manhood.

The discipline of the home in which the Virgin Mother exercised her gentle sway was the discipline of the Law. When we reflect on the fruit of this discipline in the life of Jesus, we can recognise that by the example of His own experience He proclaimed the truth that upon the great cardinal virtues of the moral Law, upon justice, holiness, purity of conscience, single-hearted sincerity and truthfulness, depends the reality of the higher

spiritual life. There can be no higher life where these fundamental virtues are neglected or belied. No beauty of spiritual vision, no rapture of ecstatic feeling, no refinement of devotion can have religious worth, if these natural virtues be destroyed or lost. It is ever an insidious temptation of the higher spiritual life to forget the frailty of the will and the need of perpetual discipline in the small mortifications of daily life. There arises often a specious claim to a higher freedom which shall allow the soul to sit loose to the ordinary demands of truth and charity and honour. The example of Jesus brings us back from this false liberty to the reality of a life, which through all the most profound experiences of the soul, and through all the ecstasies of spiritual fellowship with God, maintains intact the simple virtues of candour, honesty and truth.

We must always recognise the supremacy of the moral Law in all the conduct of life. For the Christian, obedience to its principles is not submission to a law, but allegiance to a Person. It is instinct with the devotion of personal love. This was the obedience which Jesus offered through all His life of sacrifice. It was the conscious fulfilment of the Will of a loving Father. It was not merely, as ours sometimes is, the satisfaction of a keenly-felt need or the attainment of a long-planned purpose, which found expression in His continual acts of obedience. But it was the ready submission to the Will of the

Father. Thus it became Him to fulfil all righteousness. There was no personal need for the Sinless to submit to circumcision, which in itself was a rite of purification, but it was the Father's Will.

That first obedience to the Law signified the spirit of passionate and loving acceptance with which Jesus consecrated and dignified all the sacrifice and suffering of His perfect life. So must it be with us. Not the pressure of a conscious desire, not the impulse of a rousing need, but the declared Will of God is the call to obedience. He knows our wants before we ever feel them. He sees our path before our eyes discern it. He knows our powers before we are conscious of their stirring. In our weakness He sees our strength, in our failure He sees the coming triumph. Good and wise it is, then, to make His Will and not our wants the rule of our obedience. Obedience means the lifting up of our life into the energy of the Divine Will. It is not the suppression of our powers, but the highest self-attainment. For it lays the life open to the full inspiration of the Holy Ghost; it makes the soul sensitive to the Divine influence, and responsive at all points to the call of God.

Thus Baptism, like Circumcision, binds us to an obedience. We are pledged by solemn vow, promise, and profession obediently to keep God's Holy Will and Commandments and to walk in the same all the

days of our life, while the grace of the Baptismal gift endows us with power and strength to have victory and to triumph over all the manifold temptations to disobedience with which the devil, the world, and the flesh assail us. It was by the steadfast obedience of Jesus that this Baptismal gift itself was won for us. For the essence of that atoning sacrifice which has availed for the remission of our sins lay not in the awful suffering of His death, but in the unbroken obedience of His life. And the path of true obedience was first trodden by the Feet of the Incarnate as He entered upon the suffering experiences of human life through the gateway of Circumcision. The remembrance of that noble obedience will dignify the obediences of our own daily life, and call us to ready submission to the Father's Will, not as a stern necessity, but as the willing oblation of a loving heart and the happy reliance of a believing and trustful soul.

Pray for true surrender to the Will of God.

O Almighty God, Who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men, grant unto Thy people that they may love the thing which Thou commandest and desire that which Thou dost promise, that so, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed, where true joys are to be found, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C.

"Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins." "He was so named of the angel before He was conceived in the womb." It was no new name which the Saviour took. Divine love stooped to take a name which was familiar to every Jew. It had been borne by great national heroes in Jewish history. It was still borne by many whose quiet lives in village and in town would pass untouched by fame.

Joshua had been a saviour of Israel in its hour of peril. It was under his wise and steadfast leadership that a people, fresh from forty years of desert-wandering life, had been established in Palestine, and had made a home for itself secure from the attacks of the idolatrous and warlike Canaanites. The mission of Hosea the prophet had been a mission of salvation. It was his to recall an apostate nation from the errors of false worship, and to preach the saving love of the God Who had made the Jews His own people. The prophecy of Isaiah, too, was a work of salvation, holding up before an oppressed and harassed people the certainty of God's faithfulness and the security of His defence, cheering them in their hopelessness with the saving vision of a restored and redeemed Israel, the suffering and victorious servant of God, called to be a

light to the Gentiles and a salvation unto the ends of the earth. And to Joshua also, the High Priest, who helped Zerubbabel to encourage the people when they returned from captivity, was given the saving work of restoring the worship and the faith of the nation at a critical moment in its history. These were all Jewish heroes who had borne the name which God chose for His Son. Their work had been a type of the great work of salvation which God gave to the Son of Mary to fulfil. Joshua, the captain of Israel; Hosea and Isaiah, the prophets; Joshua, the High Priest—these all prefigured the kingly, prophetic, and priestly work of Jesus, the Saviour of the world.

The Jews were accustomed to attach a special significance to names. In their national history God had taught them to read in their leaders' names the meaning of their mission. So now the Son of God, becoming man for our redemption, took upon Himself for ever a name which should clearly proclaim the mission of salvation upon which He came. In taking it He fulfils all that the name can ever mean. Deliverance, universal, all-embracing, eternal is His. It has become the "Name which is above every name." He has not only dignified it with the perfection of His Humanity but He has filled it with the glory of His Deity. No one who knows what He has done, no one who knows what He is, can ever be so ignorant or so

irreverent as to lay claim to that Holy Name. It is indeed a human name, a name accepted to express the reality of His identification with us in all the experiences of sinless humanity; but He Who bears it is God, and the Deity of His Person gives a sacred and unique glory to the Name of Jesus. "Being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

It is the name of Power. "His Name, through faith in His Name, hath made this man strong." How many can re-echo the words of S. Peter, who, appealing to the Name of Jesus in sorrow, in weakness, and in pain, have found themselves caught up into the joy and strength and peace of fellowship with the Incarnate Son of God. The victory which He has won over sin and death in the strength and steadfastness of His humanity has been won for us. He has stored up triumph for us in the treasury of His human nature. To appeal to Him by Name in prayer, to touch but the hem of His garment in the silence of sacramental fellowship, to plead the availing merits of His sacred Name before the throne of the Father, this is to draw the power of

human perfection and Divine omnipotence into our lives. To invoke His Holy Name is to drive away the spirits of evil, that devastate and defile the sanctuary of the heart, and weave round the mind the spell of hideous obsession. To call upon His precious Name is to set free the cleansing streams of that absolving Blood, which through the merits of His atoning Passion and the medium of His own sacramental grace avail to purify the soul and make it white in the Blood of the Lamb.

It is the Name of Sweetness, as the saints have found. It brings to the human heart the sense of a sympathy which can sound the depths of human experience. It expresses the agony of a soul that has been truly acquainted with human grief, the steadfastness of a will that has been held fast through all suffering to the Will of God, the patience of One Who, with the tender insistence of gentle humility and love, has braved the bitterest assaults of human cruelty and hate. It speaks of One Who, in the still calm of unbroken communion with the Father, unruffled by all the storms which broke upon His life, realised the serene joy of fellowship with God.

The name Jesus is not a talisman nor spell which works its charm by exact and mechanical repetition. But the invocation of the Name, on the lips even of the least holy and the least wise, if it be made in hope and faith, is fellowship with the All-Holy.

It lifts the life out of its weakness into effective union with the Source of all strength.

Jesus is the great Name of prayer. Sometimes the mere Name is all the prayer that we can offer. How many a sufferer, wrung with the exquisite agony of unceasing pain, has stilled the fretful murmur of the heart, and soothed the restless beating of the brain, with the sole prayer, "Jesu, Jesu." That Name alone we plead. We have no more to offer. Our deepest needs we cannot fully utter. Our mind is too clouded with weakness and pain. The power of thought seems stunned with the shock of ceaseless suffering. The heart is weighed down with sorrow. The will seems numbed and dead. But there is One Who knows, while we are all unconscious. There is One Who feels, while we are past all sense of hope and love. To Him we give ourselves in simple trust. To utter His Name is to throw ourselves unreservedly upon His boundless mercy, to set free the gracious powers of His almighty aid, to draw upon the inexhaustible treasures of His sympathy and love, to take refuge in the shelter of His eternal care.

May it be ours so earnestly to study the life of Jesus, so faithfully to follow His teaching and to love His Sacraments, so truly to take Him as Companion in our daily tasks, that in each hour of need we may seek comfort in His Holy Name, pressing our weakness close to His strength till in His Peace we rest. So the sacred and precious Name of Jesus becomes

eternal music to our ears. It is the constant refrain of that everlasting chime whose melodies abide. It is the theme of that "new song before the throne," which no man can learn save those which are redeemed from the earth, but which begins for us already here on earth, as we recognise the kindness and love of God our Saviour, Who according to His mercy saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, that being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Pray for the love of the Holy Name of Jesus.

O God, Who hast made the most glorious Name of Thy only-begotten Son Jesus Christ most dear to Thy faithful people and a terror to the spirits of evil, mercifully grant that all who devoutly worship the Name of Jesus upon earth may receive comfort in this life, and in the life to come the joy of everlasting happiness, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

VI

THE PRESENTATION

S. Luke ii. 22–39.

THE Presentation of the infant Christ in the Temple was the occasion of a special Epiphany to that small band of faithful souls in Jerusalem, who were quietly waiting for the redemption of Israel. There were those who nourished a hope that they might witness the coming of that Messianic Kingdom, which should prove the consolation of Israel. The Temple was the heart of the Holy City. In its spacious courts, and beneath its lofty colonnades, was represented every phase of the varied and manifold life of Jewish society. Here Pharisees protested their devotion in ostentatious prayer, and wealthy Sadducees displayed a comfortable satisfaction with the easy demands of their religion, taking their toll of the usurious traffic which merchants and money-changers had set up in the very precincts of the Sanctuary. There honoured Rabbis gathered disciples at their feet, while into curious ears lawyers and scribes poured forth their subtle refinements of the Law. In linen robes the

priests went about their sacred tasks, ministering to the various needs of worshippers gathered from village, town, and distant lands to fulfil the obligations of their faith at the great shrine of national hope.

For some the Temple had no secrets, held no mysteries. It was just the familiar scene of daily social intercourse. For some it was the dear home of daily worship, the seat of vision, the house of God, endeared with happy memories of frequent prayer. For others it was the place of pilgrimage. For them each visit was memorable, marking some special moment in their life. For them the Temple was a wonder, a glory, and a solemn joy. And such it was to the Blessed Virgin, as she completed her little pilgrimage from Bethlehem, and brought her Child to be presented in the House of His Father.

There was nothing to attract notice in the little group that stood in the Court of the Women at the foot of the steps that led up to the beautiful Gate of Nicanor—a simple village woman, bearing her Babe in her arms and an older man by her side carrying the birds, evidently the offering of her purification. Yet here was the fulfilment of that great prophecy, the echo of which rang constantly in the hearts of all who looked for redemption in Israel. "The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to His Temple." Startling, indeed, was the contrast between expectation and fulfilment, be-

tween the clear terms of prophecy and the actual details of achievement.

All the incidents of the Incarnate Life show age-long prophecy fulfilled in unexpected ways. The unexpected factor is always the same—lowliness, humiliation. The great God of all moves in mysterious ways of tranquillity, secrecy, and condescension. The very nearness of God's approach to man creates the difficulty for faith. To the eager gaze of the prophet there was revealed the vision of an avenging God, girt about with the majesty and might of heaven, bearing the sword of judgment, calling a terrified nation to sudden account in the house of His Glory. Behold the fulfilment. The quiet Temple court, the ordered daily routine of sacrifice and prayer, unnoticed among the humble worshippers that little group—an Infant in the arms of His mother, with an older man waiting humbly for the approach of the ministering priest. It is thus that the Lord has come suddenly to His Temple.

A.

Jesus has come for the solemn presentation of His Humanity to the Father. The time had been when in Israel, as with other Semitic nations, the eldest son was by right of birth, and of necessity, dedicated to the special service of God. Then in Israel God had marked out the tribe of Levi to perform priestly duties, and a rite of redemption

had become usual, by which the eldest son was formally presented to God and then bought back by the parents. Thus the remembrance of God's claim upon the firstborn was preserved. So the Divine Babe was brought to fulfil all the ordinances of the Law. In Him, the eldest among many brethren, Humanity spotless, perfect, pure, is offered to the Father. The Redeemer is redeemed by His people, that so the offering which He shall make may be evidently the freewill offering of a spontaneously devoted life. His Priesthood is no formal, necessary office. Out of the very heart of His perfect Humanity He rises to offer the sacrifice of stainless obedience, the self-offered Victim, the self-dedicated Priest.

In this first offering of Jesus we see the example of our own dedication. If that sinless Humanity must be dedicated to God by the solemn presentation in the Temple, how much greater the need that our sin-stained lives should seek continuous acceptance at the hands of our heavenly Father? And the offering begins in the very earliest days of our life, and involves others than ourselves. The Virgin Mother dedicated her Son. It was her offering, her presentation. It is this presentation which is needed in our homes to-day. It is for fathers and mothers to make this conscious dedication of their children to the service of God. Here lies the hope of arresting the drift of that neglect of the claim of

God upon our lives, which leads to so many an unrealised and unfulfilled vocation. The children of happy human love are the children of God's love. In Him they find their true vocation. To Him they must be given. It is not enough to place them in His arms as they are brought to be baptized. He receives them, blesses them, and gives them back to us to be trained and nurtured in the ways of truth and love.

The presentation is not fulfilled in the act of a moment. It is the spirit and atmosphere of all the period of education. Surroundings must be provided in which the thought of vocation is honoured and recognised, in which the remembrance of God's claim upon the little life is preserved, as the only condition of real happiness, the starting-point of all true success. Then the young soul will grow up with all its faculties alert and responsive to the quickening influences of the indwelling Spirit. Such a realisation of individual responsibility will not take the joy nor the brightness out of life, but it will encourage true spontaneity and provide the fullest opportunity for the steady development of all the faculties of life. It prevents the deeper instincts and impulses from being lost in the aimless futilities which so often dim and destroy the highest ideals of early life. The soul is very receptive of guidance in holiness and of noble inspiration from the very earliest days.

Such direction and leading the child not only needs but welcomes. It is his due. No one who believes in his own vocation by God will withhold it. The call to motherhood and fatherhood is not fulfilled in the mere birth of the child. The parents are called to co-operate with God the Holy Spirit in the training of the soul, which God has placed in their care. The task is delicate and difficult, entailing responsibilities from which men readily shrink.

Yet true love demands the exercise of this guiding discipline in definite and deliberate ways. This discipline is wanting where God is not the real background of the parents' lives. Where the claim of God upon the child is realised, there the power of God to guide the parents in the work of education is realised also. There is a reliance upon the help of the Holy Spirit to direct into the right channels of influence all the parents' efforts and desires, which must often be so tentative and so uncertain. Prayer is the natural accompaniment of every endeavour to create the true environment, which shall neither relax nor overstrain the growing faculties of the soul. Belief in the power of the indwelling Spirit to bring each individual life to the fulness of its purposed perfection will touch with the glory of achievement all those ideals of beauty, goodness, and noble service, which will urge the young life upon its happy way. In such an atmosphere of prayer and reliance upon the Holy Spirit

the child learns naturally to pray and to trust God for daily guidance, and begins to look out and up to God beyond the pettinesses and selfish vanities, that so readily close the eyes of the soul to all those higher aspirations and wider visions which are the inspiration of every true and noble life.

It is thus that the children must be presented to God. But such presentation means sacrifice and suffering. With true prophetic eye Simeon saw that the sword must pierce the Virgin Mother's heart. The Mother must be ready to give up her Son for the Father's work. She must be content to follow afar off, blindly to trust the mysterious ways of Divine Love, sorrowfully to watch the suffering of her Son as He fulfils the work of redemption. It is thus that the realisation of the children's vocation to-day must often mean sacrifice and suffering for the parents. It is here that so often the parents fail, partly through want of thought, partly through lack of faith. It is thoughtlessness which prevents many a mother from seeing that the daughter who is kept by her side all the years of her life has lost the chance of creating that career which alone can bring fulness and happiness to her life. The mother has bound her to the home by demands which are not the demands of unselfish love, but which spring from a self-centred vision and from a heart which has not really taken count of the claim of God upon the full and unreserved

service of each individual life. Of all these things we must take note in the first years of the children's lives. We must learn to look upon them as God's great trust to us, treasures committed to our keeping for His service. What we spend upon them, we spend upon God. We shall look not to them, but primarily to God, for the true reward of all our care and love. It is in proportion as they learn from us to give God the first place in their lives, that they themselves will be used by God to bring to us in this life the dearest recompense for all our sacrifice and service.

Pray that we may offer and present unto God ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice.

Almighty and ever-living God, we humbly beseech Thy Divine Majesty that as Thy only-begotten Son was presented in the Temple in substance of our flesh, so we may be presented unto Thee with pure and clean hearts, by the same Thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

B.

The Virgin Mother has come for her ceremonial purification. It is hers to obey every detail of the Law. The Law demanded a double offering—a sin-offering, to remove the ritual uncleanness of the mother, and a burnt-offering as a thanksgiving to

God for the gift of the child and for the right to return to the worship of the congregation. The sin-offering was always a turtle-dove or a young pigeon. The burnt-offering was the same in form as the sin-offering, if the worshipper were poor, but in the case of the rich a lamb was brought for the burnt-offering. Mary in her poverty brought the two birds as her offering. Yet truly she was rich, and brought such a Lamb as none other could, even the Lamb of God, without spot or blemish, Whose life was to be indeed a whole burnt-offering upon the altar of the Cross, a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving unto the God Whose very Son He was.

The Virgin's offering is a witness both to the full reality of Christ's human nature and to her own humility. Though her Child had been conceived by the Holy Ghost, she claimed no dispensation from the wonted dues of motherhood. Secretly she had offered herself to become the handmaid of the Lord, that it might be to her according to His word. Publicly now she offered herself to fulfil the requirements of the Law, humbly taking her place side by side with her Jewish sisters. There was nothing which could signalise to the world the great and holy secret which was hers. It was of the grace of the Holy Spirit that she could thus be silent and keep her glory hidden from the world, until in the days after the Crucifixion the time was ripe for its revelation. To all the village of Nazareth

her Child was known as the child of Joseph. Joseph's children were known as Christ's elder brothers and sisters. Joseph had passed to his rest with the secret undisclosed, before Jesus went forth to His public ministry. There was no halo of miraculous birth round the head of the Prophet Who drew the first disciples to His side. He drew them by the force of His own teaching and character. He held them by the unique grace and power of His own Personality. Jesus spoke no word Himself of His own human beginnings. He would not rely on miracle to produce faith, and Mary, ever pondering these things in her heart, for all her longing after her Son's honour and greatness, yet never intruded upon His own carefully-chosen plan of self-revelation.

Nor would it be easy in the first days for such a holy secret to find credence. What hearts were there prepared for such a mystery of holiness? Only in an atmosphere of worship and of faith could such a secret be reverently breathed. It was after the disciples and the holy women had learnt by personal fellowship with Jesus something of the unique character of His Being, and had been awakened by the Resurrection to the truth of His Deity, that Mary could impart to that little company the secret of His wondrous birth. And they would recognise the appropriateness for the Incarnate of such an entrance upon the plane of human life, and worship with new under-

standing and wonder the Saviour of the world, Son of the Virgin, Son of God.

As long as Mary lived, the secret would hardly pass beyond the circle of the women and the Apostles. With tender care S. John guarded the Virgin Mother in that quiet home to which the Master had committed her. It was the last ministry of Mary to make known the story of her vocation, unveiling to the reverent and believing hearts of the first teachers of the Church the treasured mystery of the Virgin-birth, the holy secret which God for so many years had entrusted to her humble keeping. Just as Jesus Himself had not made the wonder of His human birth any part of His popular teaching before the Resurrection, so now the Apostles found no room for it in the first message of the Gospel. They needed to rest no claim to Deity upon the miraculous birth. The Resurrection itself was the crowning proof in their teaching. Of that they themselves were witnesses. But when Mary had been called to her rest, and the first circle of disciples had begun to gather about the Apostles, strong in the faith of Jesus, their Lord and their God, then the fact of the Virgin-birth began to take its purposed place in the common knowledge of the Church, revealing itself in both Gospel and in Creed as an integral part of the Faith once delivered to the saints. Thus was the glory of Mary commemorated and the Virgin-born adored.

It was the humility and obedience of Mary that enabled her thus to play her part in the preservation of this great truth. It was her quiet pondering upon her great vocation that made her true to the inner guidance of the Holy Spirit. First and greatest among women, she yet claimed no exemption from the ordinary cares and duties of her sisters, seeking no human recognition of the unique honour and dignity with which God had so wonderfully invested her. It was thus humbly that she carried her great secret, surrendering herself at every stage to the will and purpose of her Son. That was the offering of self to which she bound herself by her Purification.

And we too have that offering to make. We too have our vocation, accepted faithfully at the hands of God, a vocation which brings precious privileges of near intercourse with Jesus, which dignifies our life with the glory of fellowship with God, and we must be careful so to train ourselves in the enjoyment of this vocation that we make no claim to special honour among our fellows, but submit ourselves readily and fully to the discipline of the duties of ordinary life. As it was with Mary, so is it with us; the glory of Christ and not of self must be the end of every life. The ways of God may seem strange and mysterious to us as they did to her, but by quiet pondering and still meditation upon what God has revealed to us, we shall learn

how to make sacrifice and service to God of every selfish impulse and every claim to special privilege and private honour. If we truly "present" to God all that He has given us, we purify ourselves of all self-glory, and gladly yield to God the vindication of that peculiar dignity with which His love has so richly blessed our lives.

Pray that we may be made worthy of our calling.

> Remember, O Lord, what Thou hast wrought in us, and not what we deserve. And, as Thou hast called us to Thy service, make us worthy of our calling, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C.

If the Presentation in the Temple shows to us the offering of infancy and the sacrifice of motherhood, it reveals also the blessing of old age. The Lord did not come suddenly to His Temple quite unrecognised. For this day the aged Simeon had waited. Taught by the Holy Ghost, Simeon had moved daily among the worshippers in the Temple, expecting himself that the prayers of a holy lifetime would be fulfilled, and that his eyes should rest upon the Hope of Israel. The prophetic vision was his, which allowed him to pierce the mysterious humility of the ways of the Almighty and enabled him to forecast the sufferings of the Incarnate, and to read the secrets of that fellowship of suffer-

ing by which the lives of those who were His should be consecrated. The vision which holiness brings, and which long years of experience confirms, had been quickened by the power of the Holy Ghost. The expectation of many hearts that waited like him for the consolation of Israel had been dimmed by the long years of delay. But Simeon stood firm in the confidence that the intuition of his heart was not in vain. The failing glory of his old age should be crowned with the vision of the Messiah. Thus he had taken his place steadfastly day by day in the Temple, a very pillar of hope, waiting patiently for the fulfilment of the Divine promise. And as the Virgin Mother moved with her Babe to the Temple steps, Simeon drew near in the power of the Holy Ghost and welcomed them with the solemn warning of a prophet and the benediction of a priest.

The Child was set for the uplifting of many in Israel. There were those whose pious hopes and love of righteousness and longings for Divine help would find fulfilment in the Prophet of Nazareth. For such the fetters of Judaism would be burst, and they would rise in Him to a new life of faith and fellowship and service. There were others who would find in Him a "rock of offence," against which their feet would stumble, whose self-blinded eyes could not see in Him the Sun of Righteousness, who could not accustom themselves to the ways of Divine humility and love. And for

Mary herself there would be piercing agony of heart, as she gave her Son to His ministry of sacrifice and followed Him wonderingly to the Cross. But God would justify His ways to those that loved Him. And a deep peace fell upon Simeon as he held the Child in his arms. The great hope of his life was achieved. His eyes rested on the Saviour, the Light of the World, Who should fulfil the promised glory of Israel and shed the light of redemption upon the Gentiles. God was indeed sending him forth from his troubled life in peace. There was no more which this world could offer. The word of promise had been fulfilled. His Lord was gathering His servant to Him, refreshed with the multitude of peace. And to the blessing of the aged priest was added the thanksgiving of the prophetess. As Simeon spoke, Anna passed into the Temple on her daily mission of prayer and devotion, which for more than eighty years she had fulfilled in the sanctuary, serving God with fastings and prayers day and night. It should be hers to make known to others how wonderfully the prayers and hopes of the faithful had been fulfilled, and she spake of Him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

What a ministry is here revealed for the latter years of life! These years, which with their growing infirmities and fading powers become so often a burden to self and a vexation to others, may be the

very years when the glad blessing of a long life of faithful hope and service may descend upon others, and the hearts of those who wait for redemption may be cheered by the simple words of thankful witness to the mercies which God has shown to us. These are the years of vision, the years when the encouragement of a life's experience of God's faithfulness may be impressed upon those before whom the way is yet untried.

Indeed for such the last years of life may well be the best, while the soul looks with new understanding over the way in which God has led it, secretly counting up and treasuring His lavish mercies, welcoming with joy the new light which God is preparing for the youth of the world. May it be ours thus as servants of God to leave the troubles of this world in His peace, that we may find beyond the grave an ampler service and a deeper peace in the manifold ministries and blessed fellowship of Paradise.

Pray for God's blessing on the aged.

O Everlasting God, Who guidest our steps in life and art the Light of all our days, grant to the aged the consolation and comfort of the Holy Spirit, that through the growing infirmities of age they may be upheld by Thy strength, and may be cheered by the vision of Thy glory. Sustain them in weakness, and draw them ever closer to Thyself, that they may bear witness to the joy of

fellowship with Jesus by the holiness and happiness of their lives, and may trust themselves faithfully in death to His almighty keeping, Who with Thee and the Holy Ghost liveth and reigneth God for ever and ever.

VII

THE WISE MEN

S. Matthew ii. 1–18.

BY ages of prophecy the whole Jewish people had been prepared for the coming of the Messiah, but only the shepherds of Bethlehem, at the bidding of the angels, had welcomed Him at His birth. Among pagan peoples God had prepared the hearts of men in various ways to expect a deliverer. And at the call of His star only the Wise Men from the East came to find and worship Him at Bethlehem. While Simeon in his psalm of dying thankfulness saluted the Holy Child as the Light to lighten the Gentiles, these representatives of the Gentile nations were already drawing near to Jerusalem on their great quest of faith. Their pagan hearts had been more responsive to the dim intimations of the Divine call than Israel had been to the clear prophecies, with which God had so frequently sought to stir the hopes of His own people. In this Epiphany to the Gentiles there is the promise of that welcome

which the world should one day give to Him Who is the Desire of all nations.

A.

In some unknown city of the East certain astrologers had been persuaded by their study of the heavens that the appearance of a shining star would herald the birth of a great king, who should bring deliverance to a world steeped in sorrow, suffering, and sin. So sure was their conviction of the truth of their science, and so faithful were their hearts to the call of righteousness, that they were ready to leave their home and people, and follow the leading of the star until they found the King. Many must have mocked their errand as the caravan left the city to cross the western desert on its novel quest. The faith of the Wise Men held on. Night by night the star still shone in the western heavens, and they shaped their daily course to follow its guidance, until they came to Jerusalem. Jerusalem was stirred at their coming. But their quest was not ended yet. They arrived at the palace of Herod. "Where is He that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East, and are come to worship Him." It was a further trial of their faith that they found themselves guided to the little city of Bethlehem. It was here, the rabbis said, that they would find the object of their

search. So, following the star, the caravan stopped before the lowly home of Mary, and at the feet of the royal Child the Wise Men bowed, offering their princely gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. This was the crowning vindication of their faith, that in the poverty of that home, in the weakness of the infant Child, they should recognise the majesty of the King Whom they sought. Unknown by His own people, unrecognised by those among whom He dwelt, He was yet welcomed by these Eastern sages and worshipped in the arms of the lowly Virgin. Their worship was at once a prophecy and fulfilment. It set a crown upon the long preparation by which God had silently led the pagan world towards Himself, and it foreshadowed that adoration of the Incarnate which should one day, in the long purposes of God, make the kingdoms of the world the kingdoms of His Christ.

Pray that we may have faith in this world and sight in the world to come.

O God, Who by the leading of a star didst manifest Thy only-begotten Son to the Gentiles, mercifully grant, that we, which know Thee now by faith, may after this life have the fruition of Thy glorious Godhead, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

B.

The truth of this Epiphany of God to the Wise Men lies behind all the mission efforts of the Church to-day, revealing its principle, inspiring its method, sustaining its faith. In the systems of religious teaching, which through long years of habit and obedience have moulded the national life of many pagan peoples, we find hints and adumbrations of the truth with which God had prepared the world for the final revelation of the Incarnate. God has never left Himself without witness in the hearts of those whom He has made for Himself. Jesus, the eternal Word of God, the Light of the World, has been ever present in the slow evolution of human progress. Nature reveals His presence. Nature is the veil of created beauty through which a Spiritual Personality of uncreated loveliness makes perpetual self-disclosure.

In Man, too, the crown of created life, at all stages of his development, God has revealed His eternal purpose. In the endowments of reason and conscience lies the power of man's recognition of God, and of the Divine appeal to man's obedience and love. It is thus that the Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world is manifested. Reason is not a barely intellectual faculty, drawing only upon the forces of the mind. It is the unifying power in

natural man, which carries with it the exercise of all the faculties of life, and draws them all harmoniously towards one goal. Through all the varied experiences of life, reason leads men to reach out from the many to the One, always moving towards truth, intuitively sure of the unity which it seeks, of the unity from which it flows, even God.

Reason is that capacity of personal insight into reality to which God is able to appeal in every man. In its highest form that means insight into the Being of God Himself. Not without long training, not indeed without special revelation, could the reason of sinful men gain true insight into the truth of God's Being. But that has ever been its purpose and that its gradually-won achievement. Only slowly could reason be schooled to bend its powers to the study of the higher truths, but everywhere the powers of reason were God's witness in man. Rightly did the Fathers place Socrates and Plato and the great thinkers of antiquity among the prophets of God, and see in them the direct working of Christ.

It is this to which the coming of the Wise Men bears witness. In them God is vindicating His self-disclosure to the world before the coming of His Son. The Light which shone before the Incarnation was sufficient to point the way aright to Jesus when He came. All the attainments of the ancient world, the wonderful achievements of its civilisation, the intellectual triumphs

of the Greeks, the religious aspirations of the mystics of the East, the moral insight of the philosophers of the West, the yearning after a deeper personal holiness—all this was the work of the Light that lighteneth every man that cometh into the world. By the light which was theirs has each generation, each soul, been judged. Judgment does not wait till the far-distant ages of the Resurrection Day. With each opportunity of knowledge, with each fresh revelation of truth, judgment has already come. With each acceptance of the good and the true has come the revelation of higher truth and greater capacity for goodness. With each denial has come incapacity to see goodness and truth.

It is, then, people upon whose horizon the light of truth has already dawned, to whom we come to-day with the gospel of the Incarnation. We would lead them from their twilight to the glory of perfect day. We come with sympathy for the response they have already made to their imperfect knowledge. We recognise that they have been already taught of God. We would reinforce that weak knowledge and quicken those inadequate ideals and lead on to perfection the witness which reason, conscience, and experience have borne in their lives, by presenting to them the fulness of truth as it is in Christ Jesus. With the courage and wisdom of the great Christian teachers of Alexandria we shall ourselves hold the faith so

firmly, and know it so profoundly, that we shall be able to seize fruitfully upon all those points of contact which abound to-day between the great religious systems of the East and the truth as it is in Jesus. This is the great need of the mission field to-day, teachers who by knowledge, sympathy, and study can enter into the spirit of those great faiths, can appreciate that which is true in them, and can realise in what way they are actual preparations for the truth of the Incarnation. The adoration of the Magi represents the offering of all intellectual gifts before the throne of Jesus. May not one way of offering be the dedication of the mind to the special study of this aspect of mission work, that once more the leaders of heathen thought may be led to follow the star of Bethlehem and offer their precious gifts to Jesus, their God, their Saviour, and their King ?

Pray for the mission work of the Church.

O Jesu, Saviour of the World, Light of the Gentiles, and Glory of Thy people Israel, have pity on those who know Thee not, on those who have forgotten Thee, and on those who are far from the Church of their fathers in a strange land. Visit them with Thy salvation. Hasten, we pray Thee, Thy Kingdom, that the earth may be filled with the knowledge of Thy glory, as the waters cover the sea. And may these our prayers be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer.

C.

The Wise Men worshipped the Holy Child, and, once more obedient to the call of God, departed into their own country another way. Then there fell upon Bethlehem the cruel vengeance of the disappointed king. "He slew all the children that were in Bethlehem and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under."

There are mysteries of human suffering which are too deep for our minds to fathom. But where our reason fails, our faith can follow. It is so with the massacre of the Holy Innocents. The Wise Men have brought their gifts. The children now have brought their lives and laid them at the feet of Jesus. Here is the mystery of the suffering of innocence. Is it not the very mystery of the Cross?

In the first days of His incarnate life Jesus calls the little ones to drink of that cup of which He so deeply drinks, and to be baptized with that baptism with which He is baptized. The tragedy of Bethlehem affirms the supreme claim of Jesus upon every human life. He is God. All lives are His. He takes them hence that they may serve him still in life, but in the ampler life that lies beyond the grave. It is our comfort to know that the field of His service is not bound by the narrow limits of this world's opportunities. A ministry of fuller service and more

dedicated obedience awaits us in the world beyond. The little lives, that serve Christ's glory here with the pathos of unconscious sacrifice, serve Him in Paradise with the conscious and willing sacrifice of happy and thankful allegiance.

God is supreme over every life. His Love decides the sphere of each soul's service. His Wisdom rules the destiny of each, that all may find their place of promised glory in His Kingdom. The young lives, cut off in the first vigour of their strength, with brilliant powers of mind and soul still undeveloped here, bright with the promise of such great achievement, will find a world more worthy of their powers, where sin no longer thwarts the Will of God, where holiness and love grow ever more and more, and all the broken hopes of earth find sure fulfilment in the fellowship of God. And thus the lives of the martyred children, hallowed by the infinite and atoning merits of the Holy Child Jesus, for Whom they died, fulfilled their service of Christ in higher ways, beyond the ken of mortal eyes, first-fruits of the sacrifice of the Incarnate.

Here, in the massacre of the Innocents, is God's witness to the fruitfulness of suffering in every human life. It is easy to recognise how suffering may be a needed discipline for our sinful lives. We can trace the refining power of suffering in many a sorely chastened life. But God would show us that the suffering of the innocent is fruitful and redemp-

tive in the lives of others. By the Incarnation of His dear Son the powers of human life have been enhanced and a new dignity bestowed upon our manhood. As He, the perfect Man, was made perfect through suffering, and in the fulness of His representative Manhood shared all the agony of sinful men, so we, who are linked with Him in sacramental fellowship and union, find a redemptive power in the sufferings which we bear in His Name. It is but the following of the Master, pressing close in the footsteps of His bleeding Feet. As we look at the vision of perfect holiness, we see the Holy God Himself not inflicting suffering, but bearing it. From the manger of Bethlehem to the cross of Calvary the way of the Incarnate was the way of suffering.

Infinite Love took upon Him the whole burden of human suffering because He was holy. Only the Holy could experience to the full what the bitterness of suffering meant and what its glory was. The suffering life of Jesus, consummated on the Cross, is the offering to God of the holy will of mankind, the redemption of the unholy. And to-day the power of that holy sacrifice of perfect obedience spreads its sanctification over every duty nobly done and every hardship bravely borne. From the suffering of Christ flows the hallowing of every sacrifice, the glorifying of every sorrow. Under the impulse of that great act of racial obedience, which was fulfilled upon the Cross, every

obedience of man is touched with the inspiration of holiness, and every sacrifice is lifted up into the sphere of Christ's redemptive work.

It is Holy Church which turns the solidarity and fellowship of mankind to its highest use and pours its sanctifying powers through all the channels of human brotherhood. Through the mysterious powers of the fellowship that is in Christ, which the Church ministers to-day through the Divine efficacy of sacrament and prayer, acts of courageous suffering and deeds of noble sacrifice lift men out of the isolation of self into fellowship with the All-Holy. Suffering becomes almost a sacrament of human fellowship. It sweeps away the barriers which isolate and divide. It gives a soul power to sway the lives of others, and makes each soul itself more sensitive to the subtle influences of unity and brotherhood, which are so potent to sanctify, to strengthen, and uphold.

The suffering of the innocent binds both them and their brethren nearer to God. Must we not believe that those who lay down their lives for their brethren, offering themselves gladly and courageously in the cause of honour, liberty, and truth, will wake in the world beyond with joy to find their feet already set far upon that way of holiness, along which the Spirit there shall lead them with unhindered progress, till in ever-growing glory their sanctification is completed before the throne of heaven? Must we

not believe that those who, in fellowship with such heroic souls, have passed through all the agony and suffering of the battlefield, will find that they have been lifted up to new heights of manhood, from which the holiness of God has been more clearly seen, and will hear ringing in their ears the clarion call of God ever to follow the highest through all suffering and sacrifice and pain ?

" In Ramah was there a voice heard, lamentation and weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not." It was indeed the suffering of the mothers that made the tragedy so great. The little ones passed quickly to their rest ; the agony of the mothers lingered on, a lifelong suffering. For them there was no solace but submission to the Will of God. No light shone upon their desolate way. But to us in our sorrow there shines the Easter glory of the Risen Lord. We know that God is Love, and that Incarnate Love has suffered. Our sufferings are transfigured by the sympathy and fellowship of the Man of Sorrows. We know that, through the agony of our first grief, His love will hold us fast, and our faith in Him will not fail. We shall throw ourselves upon the fulness of His infinite Wisdom, and trust to Him our dearest and our best without the bitterness of doubt or fear. He will show us how we may enrich our own lives with the spirit of their sacrifice and the glory of their

obedience. He will teach us how their work may live on through us, and will bind us to them in the sacramental fellowship of the Altar, that our lives may be enriched by the grace of Him Who holds both them and us in the close embrace of His love.

Pray for all those who have been suddenly called to their rest.

Remember, O Lord, all those, the brave and the true, who have died the death of honour, serving Thee in their death, and are departed in the hope of Resurrection to eternal life. To Thy love and to Thy mercy we commend them, Who art the comfort of those that mourn and the victor over death. In that place of life, whence sorrow and mourning are far banished, give them rest, O Lord, and peace in the land of hope, where light eternal shines upon the souls of the faithful, through Thy merits, O blessed Redeemer, Who with the Father and the Holy Ghost livest and reignest one God for ever and ever.

VIII

NAZARETH

S. Luke ii. 39, 40, 51, 52.

WE look to Nazareth for the consecration of all home life. The reserve and reticence with which the Gospels speak of the childhood of Jesus and the life at Nazareth gave room for the invention in early days of many fanciful stories, ascribing miracles and prodigies to Him in His boyhood. But all that we are told of the actual life at Nazareth, apart from the Passover visit to Jerusalem at the age of twelve, is summed up in these few words: "And when they had performed all things according to the Law of the Lord, they returned unto Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. And the Child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him." "He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and He was subject unto them. And Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man."

A.

It may be that this silence is due to the fact that it was not within the scope of the first mission preaching of the Gospel to do more than to emphasize the leading features of Christ's public ministry, and to declare the outstanding facts of His atoning Death, His Resurrection, and His Ascension. But it must always be significant to us that a sacred silence veils the beauty of that wondrous Childhood. When Jesus came into the world, He made a home His dwelling-place. The remembrance of that must hallow every home. We may reverently think of the joy which His Presence brought to the heart of Mary, and of the peace which stole into the life of Joseph as he watched the Holy Child. We can imagine how beautiful was the response of human love which began to wake in the heart of the Child Jesus as the care of Joseph and the devotion of Mary broke upon His growing consciousness.

We picture for ourselves that ideal Boyhood, when, in the midst of the simple duties of the daily routine, in the hours of play and work, in the affections of home and the familiar intercourse of neighbours and companions, there gradually rose the consciousness of His own unique relation to God the Father. The sense of a great mission began to touch His young life with solemn purpose, and the soul's

ardent aspirations were fixed upon the fulfilment of the Divine Will. With what eager readiness and quick apprehension the Holy Child must have learned those first lessons of simple faith and devotion, which it was the joy of the Virgin Mother to teach, as she opened to Him the story of God's promise to His people and read to Him the Law and Prophecy of old. We see the poverty of the carpenter's home. We can picture the ardent spirit of willing service which drew Jesus to the side of Joseph as he worked. The sympathy of a loving child—what untold power of inspiration and peace those gentle ministries of childhood bring. All that the sweetness, the beauty, the innocence, and the happiness of childhood can do to make home heaven was revealed in the home at Nazareth.

So we think reverently of the hidden life of those thirty years spent in the peace of that country village, and realise how, in the great purpose of God, home is the chosen place of discipline and preparation for the highest work of life. Home has its mysteries of love and peace, its training in sorrow, toil, and joy, its power to shape the destinies of life, its inspiration, its glory, and its hidden work, which Jesus has known and blessed for us by His experience. It dignifies our home life to remember how sacred the mysteries of home were to Jesus. We need the sympathetic secrecy of the home, its quiet intercourse of mutual love, its life of obedience,

its opportunities of peace, its atmosphere of trust and affection, in which to realise ourselves and be prepared for the wider work to which God may call us. It was thus that Jesus, in the sphere of home, "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man." How impatient we ourselves grow of the restraints and discipline of the home. How little we care to guard its secrets and observe a sacred silence about its intimacies, treasuring its confidences, making it a retreat of peace, a shelter from the rough and noisy world.

God's discipline and training for the perfect Man was the home. It must be so with us. Its influences are round us from the beginning of our life; from the earliest days it shapes our character in subtle and persistent ways of which we are quite unconscious. The first impulses and tendencies and desires in veriest infancy are moulded by the life of the home and the care of those who tend us in our weakness. And as we grow and begin to take note of our surroundings, and are able to make conscious response to the influences which encircle us, there come the first lessons of obedience and restraint, of gentleness and loving service. Where love exercises its wise and gentle discipline, the young soul gains a vigour and a self-reliance, a sense of reverence and an ideal of honour, a freedom of self-expression and a gracious chivalry, which can only be learnt in the sympathetic circle of the home.

Pray for the children of our Church and Nation.

O Blessed and Loving Saviour Jesus Christ, Who in the home at Nazareth didst reveal the beauty of perfect childhood, and in the days of Thy Ministry didst call the little ones unto Thee and bless them, look down to-day upon the children of this nation, and grant that in homes sanctified by Thy Presence and devoted to Thy glory, they may grow up in the love and in the fear of Thee, and in the knowledge of the true Faith, through the grace of the indwelling Spirit, Who with Thee and the Almighty Father liveth and reigneth one God, for ever and ever.

B.

"Jesus went down to Nazareth, and was subject unto them." Jesus gave Himself as perfect Man to all those varied influences of growth and development which the home offered, learning obedience from the gentle rule of Mary and the devoted care of Joseph. We can easily picture the unselfish and happy ministries of His Boyhood in the home at Nazareth, the help given to Mary in the duties of the house, the work done with Joseph in the carpenter's shop, the thousand happy and beautiful ways in which a child will find expression for its sympathy and clinging affection. And, as childhood passed and boyhood was growing into manhood, the joy of the home must have centred round Jesus.

To Him the mother would turn for sympathy, resting more and more upon Him the burdens of the home, while He took an ever-growing share in the work of Joseph.

Nor was it only the joys of home that Jesus shared at Nazareth. Jesus knew what misunderstanding was. There were those about Him in the village who were known as His "brethren"—James and Joses and Judas and Simon—a little older than Himself, who did not believe in Him. He found in them no sympathy with His own ideals. There was little fellowship of thought and purpose. Their jealousy and suspicion and contempt prepared Jesus for the rough usage of the world, and tested the faith and obedience of His boyhood. He knew how to turn aside the angry word and be silent under the lash of innuendo, taunt, and contradiction.

For us, too, the home often brings the same trials. Nowhere is misunderstanding so difficult to bear as in the home. Just where the intimacy is greatest, and the more secret tendencies of the life and the inner purposes of the soul are most revealed, the opportunities of suffering are most frequent. With us, too, there has been lack of true and tender understanding in the home. How often that very proximity and fellowship of daily life, which should have been the means of linking two souls together in the bond of truest sympathy and mutual knowledge, has become the source of fretful difference,

resentment, and dislike. In the moments of such suffering it is a help to know that Jesus experienced the pain of being misunderstood, and steadfastly resisted those temptations to sullen brooding, morose bitterness, and self-pity to which it exposes us. In trustful reliance upon the Father's love and in quiet obedience to His Will, Jesus found the way of escape from all the dangers of loneliness, contempt, and misunderstanding.

In Mary, pondering silently the mysteries of her Child's development, yielding to Him ever the affectionate sympathy and silent understanding of a reverent love, we see the pattern and example of what we want to be to those who grow up with us in the home. We may not fully understand the mind of others, for human dispositions and character are so different, but we can make reverent allowance for the manifold variety of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and believe that these temperaments, so different from our own, and so hard for us to fathom, have been chosen by God to be the environment of our life, and have a part to play in the development of our character, which only the painstaking sympathy and patient insight of gentleness and love can fulfil.

And Jesus knew the sorrow of bereavement in the home. The day came at length, while Jesus was still at Nazareth, when Joseph was called to his rest, and Mary missed the companionship of him who had upheld and protected her with such

sympathy and self-sacrificing love through the days of her virgin motherhood. It was Jesus Himself Whose tender sympathy and faith cheered the heart of Mary in her great sorrow. He too in the fulness of His human affection felt the pang of grief, as He gave Himself to tend the stricken heart of His virgin Mother. It was for her the beginning of sorrow. A greater loneliness was yet to come upon her, when her Son should be called away to His ministry. And the bereavement of the three years' ministry would soon be crowned by the supreme agony of the death upon the Cross. Jesus would prepare her for that Cross, as side by side with her He faced the issues of death for the first time in the home at Nazareth. And we too, upon whose homes the shadow of death has fallen with such suddenness, are glad to turn for sympathy and help to One Who not only is the God of Life, the Risen Lord, Conqueror over death, but Who can share with us the sorrow of the darkened home, Who Himself in the strength of a pure and gentle love has undertaken the tender human ministries of consolation and comfort to those who mourn.

Pray that the peace of the home at Nazareth may be ours.

Blessed Jesus, sweet Child of the Virgin Mary, Son of God most high, help us to-day to sanctify our homes by the remembrance of Thy perfect obedience and Thy gentle love, that following the example of the diligence, the self-control, and the

holiness of Thy Childhood, we may make our homes more worthy of Thy Presence, and may win for them the benediction of peace, to Thy honour and glory, Who in the unity of the Father and the Holy Ghost ever livest and reignest, one God, eternal and almighty.

C.

The death of Joseph must have laid a greater burden upon the shoulder of Jesus for the maintenance of the home. As He had come to the fulness of strength, His help had more and more reinforced the growing weakness of Joseph. We can think of Jesus learning his craft with eager care, studying to give perfection to all He did, as He applied Himself steadfastly to the discipline of the carpenter's shop. Mary might wonder that the child of such Divine promise could give Himself so contentedly to such simple work. But while she wondered, she rejoiced that her eyes could rest upon Him still and her hands could minister to His needs and her love could yet anticipate His wants. In that discipline of daily toil Jesus was dignifying for ever the lot of the worker. Manual labour in all its drudgery and irksome hardship and poverty and strain was hallowed by the devoted toil of the Incarnate. He took away the reproach which might cling to the work of men's hands. He consecrated the tiredness and fatigue of bodily exertion, as He gave Himself so faithfully to the

work of the carpenter's bench, earning a simple livelihood by the sweat of His brow. All work is blessed by His example and His experience.

All workers can claim the sympathy of One Who has for thirty years known the conditions of a workman's life of unremitting toil and straitened means. The experience of Jesus shows how man may escape from the limitations and restraints which a long stress of manual work may easily place upon the full development of all the higher faculties of the soul. In the monotony and fatigue of work it is easy to lose the higher ideals, to forget the fellowship of God, and to miss the refining grace of spiritual inspiration. But the experience of Jesus shows how the inward vision may always inspire the long monotony of manual work. We can learn from Him how possible it is for the soul to retain its quick and tender sensitiveness to spiritual things even through the frequent strain of physical fatigue. It is true that in His work at Nazareth Jesus was never confronted with those difficult conditions and complex problems, social, economic and industrial, which confront us in the organised life of Labour to-day. But in His own simple devotion to duty in the carpenter's shop, He has for all time revealed the dignity of work, has blessed its sacrifice and hallowed its suffering, while He has lifted it up before the eyes of men as a vocation in which the holiest may learn the needed lessons of discipline

and obedience, and may make happy and true response to the call of our heavenly Father. Whatever be the conditions of our work to-day, that work will prove our sanctification if it be touched with the spirit of Jesus the Carpenter of Nazareth.

D.

We cannot miss the significance of the long years of quiet preparation which the life at Nazareth offered for the few years' public ministry which was to follow. Both the length and the silence of this period of preparation have their meaning for us to-day. In the stress and publicity of modern life we are apt to be impatient both of the slow processes which are needed for true progress, and of the reticence and reserve which are the normal conditions of true growth and development. In all phases of life these tendencies reveal themselves. Children are hurried into a precocious publicity. The powers of growing genius succumb to the temptation of premature notoriety. There are so few quiet spaces in life to-day. So little room is left for silent growth. Life becomes a succession of impressions. There can be no steady growth where there is neither patience nor peace. Religion in human life is meant to bring to our aid both these needed elements of stable character and quiet strength. And religious life needs for its own

development just those same conditions of slow and silent growth. Yet it is just there in our religious life that we are most impatient. It is hard to realise how much we need the spirit of retreat for the normal development of our spiritual life. We expect our vocation to be realised so soon, and can scarcely conceive that home is meant under God to offer a long period of primary probation. So we snatch at our vocations and are lost. Long years of quiet preparation are needed for the active warfare of life. Prayer and meditation and time spent before the altar must become the Nazareth preparation for each fresh day's task, if our work is to be truly done.

Pray for the spirit of rest and peace.

O Blessed Spirit of God, still with the tranquil inspiration of Thy grace the restlessness of our souls, and give us peace. Grant that we may have faith to wait patiently upon the Will of God, and may tarry the leisure of the Lord that He may comfort our hearts, and stablish us in His strength, through the might of Thy holy Indwelling, Who art the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, One in glory, eternity and power with the Father and the Son for ever and ever.

IX

THE FIRST PASSOVER

S. Luke ii. 41–52.

ONE incident alone stands out in clear relief from the background of silence which marks the life at Nazareth—the visit of Jesus, at the age of twelve, to the Passover Festival at Jerusalem. The first recorded utterance of Jesus is the answer which He made in the Temple Courts to the remonstrance of Mary and Joseph: "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?"

A.

For a child so imbued with the spirit of vocation as Jesus, it must have been a memorable day when the time came to join the Passover caravan and go up with the "company" of Nazareth to the Holy City. The journey was a pilgrimage of joyous devotion. It was a glad and happy company that crossed the Jordan and made its easy way down the left bank of the river, and forded the stream again by Jericho, passing along to Bethany. Even for

those who knew it well the first sight of the Temple, as it broke upon the view on the way from Bethany to the Kedron, stirred feelings of wonder and devotion. Often must Jesus have listened in Nazareth to the Virgin Mother's memories of the solemn beauty and grandeur of the Holy City. He knew Sion to be the city of the great King, the joy of the whole earth, the place which God had chosen to set His Name there. Now He stood and gazed at the shining wonder of the Temple, and the sense of mission stirred anew within Him. A hidden depth of purpose and of hope moved Him as He lifted up His voice in the chorus of the pilgrims' psalms and entered joyfully into the Holy City.

Soon their lodging was found, and the Holy Family gave themselves to the solemnities of the festival. At once the solemn spell of the Temple fell upon Jesus. The glory of its courts, the splendour of its ritual, the thronged and joyous worship of the sanctuary brought satisfaction to many of those bright hopes which the teaching of Mary had fostered in the heart of her Child. By His mother's side He watched the Rabbis' teaching and listened to the questions and answers of their disciples who gathered round them in the porticoes of the Temple Courts. A new stage was reached in the development of His own religious consciousness. A new light of self-knowledge broke over His soul, as He listened to the discussion of truths which He had begun to make

His own. A new stirring of interest and of power awoke in Him, of which neither Mary nor Joseph was conscious. He remained with them, happy in all the social and religious interests of the Festival, until the days of the Feast had run their course. For the first time He took His place in the little Passover company of twelve, gathered in some quiet upper room to eat the solemn meal.

At last the days were fulfilled and the pilgrims began to turn homeward. But in the "company" of Nazareth the Child Jesus was missing. He had tarried behind in Jerusalem, and Joseph and His mother knew not of it. It caused them no alarm that He should not be at their side. Doubtless He was with their kinsfolk and acquaintance, lost in the busy interchange of happy boyish confidences over the first eventful visit to the Holy City. But when the day closed in and careful search among their friends still brought no news of Him, confidence gave way to anxiety, and they turned back to Jerusalem seeking Him. "And it came to pass that after three days they found Him in the Temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions. And all that heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. And when they saw Him, they were amazed. And His mother said unto Him, "Son, why hast Thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing." And

He said unto them, "How is it that ye sought Me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" And they understood not the saying which He spake unto them. But He could say no more to open their understanding then. It was enough. He had borne witness to the integrity of His conscience in obeying the call of His Father to linger in His Father's house. He would return at once to the obedience of Nazareth. He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them. But the message of Jerusalem could not escape the thoughtful mind of Mary. "His mother kept all these sayings in her heart."

Pray that we may find Jesus.

O Blessed Saviour, Who didst say to those who sought Thee sorrowing, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" and didst give Thyself into their care, grant us ever so to seek Thee whom our souls desire to love, that we may both find Thee and be found by Thee, and keep us, good Lord, ever near to Thyself, Who art the satisfaction of all our desires and the eternal lover of our souls.

B.

"Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" A wealth and a mystery of meaning lie hid in these words. The wonder of them lies not in the wise and tender gentleness with which

the anxiety of Joseph and His Mother is rebuked and their sorrowful remonstrance answered, but in the revelation which they offer of Christ's own self-consciousness. Might we not say that the words express the Epiphany of His Godhead to the growing manhood of Jesus? We can never hope to do justice to the unique character of the consciousness of the Incarnate. Of the two natures which Jesus united in His one Divine Person, we can understand more of the conditions of the human than of the Divine. We know that the possession of the Divine nature in no way impaired the fulness and truth of His human nature, and that no power of deity intervened to restrain or alter the experiences which are proper and necessary to a perfect, sinless human life.

From the nature of our own experience we can know therefore with certainty more about the details of the human nature of Christ than we can about the divine. We know that for the truth of that nature there must have been growth and gradual development in spiritual as well as bodily attainment. We cannot tell in what way the consciousness of His Deity was communicated to His human powers of apprehension, nor to what extent the infinite and eternal wisdom which is proper to Godhead brought unknown influences to bear upon His human powers of understanding and knowledge. We can perhaps more rightly emphasize

the limitations and restraints which the Incarnation placed upon Christ's immediate exercise of the supreme powers and prerogatives of Godhead, than dwell upon the glorious exaltation of all human faculties to unknown possibilities of perfection and divine fellowship, which union with the Godhead may have bestowed upon our human nature in the bosom of Christ. But whatever the character of that unique consciousness of the God-Man, we can believe it was the work of the Holy Spirit, with Whom Jesus as God was One in substance, glory and eternity, and by Whom as perfect man His human nature was ever guided and inspired.

It was through the Holy Spirit acting upon His humanity that the Child Jesus made response to the call of God. Of that response the words uttered in the Temple are the first spoken witness. He has come to the knowledge of His unique relation to the heavenly Father. The sense of Sonship begins to lay its responsibilities upon His life. His mission opens out before Him. The visit to the Passover evidently marks a stage in the development of His Messianic consciousness. That development has no signs of prodigy nor marvel about it. It is just the spiritual quickening of tendencies and instincts and visions which had increasingly shaped the mind and thought and purpose of Jesus, as the rapid maturity of Eastern boyhood

brought Him to the first great crisis of life. The age of decision is upon Him. He chooses "the Father's business." He would make His Father's house His home. What the Temptation was to His adult manhood, the revelation of this visit was to His boyhood and youth. He was offered a way of escape from the limitations of human suffering and the vision of human sin. He chose the Cross of obedience. Implicit in this avowal of recognised Sonship is His determination to accept all its responsibilities, and to be loyal at all stages to His growing consciousness of the mission laid upon Him by the Father. Therefore He will wait upon the Father for the revelation of His Will. And the Will of the Father demands that all the powers of His manhood should be slowly prepared and equipped in the silent years of Nazareth for the great work of man's salvation. The moment of insight is the moment of decision and surrender. Whether the vision be continued in its clearness or fail in its certainty as the days pass, it becomes the inspiration of an obedience that holds itself true to the reality which it has surely seen. Through hours of gloom the task will surely be fulfilled which the hour of insight has revealed.

Is it not so also with ourselves? We struggle towards a sense of true vocation. At length, in some moment of vision, in prayer or sacrament, the Will of God is seen, the true direction of our

life is realised. At once the soul must bind itself to obedience, if life is not to fail presently of its purpose. God asks no unconsidered obedience; He seeks the deliberate obedience of a life slowly and patiently moulded to His Will. The acceptance of vocation means not only a glad welcome given to the Will of God, but a solemn dedication of ourselves to those long and silent years of preparation which alone can fit us for our task.

As it was with our Lord, so it is with ourselves; we cannot hide our realisation of the Divine call. We may be missed for a while from our wonted place, and we shall acknowledge, when we are found, that we are about our Father's business, tenderly and without reproach recalling those who seek us to the truth of the Divine call, which has laid its imperative claim upon our lives. Jesus went down with Joseph and Mary to Nazareth, so we will return to the quiet routine of the daily duties of home, in which God has marked out for us our sphere of discipline and probation. We shall learn to tarry the Lord's leisure and be strong in the silence of the home, and He will comfort our hearts with the growing vision of His Will and the assurance of His protection. It is the special work of the Holy Spirit, at the age of our Confirmation, to seize and to sanctify all those instincts of reverence, those first perceptions of the Divine Will, and those first enthusiasms of holy and unselfish service with which the generous

ideals of our boyhood are so readily inspired. It is His to bring all our powers into obedience to a sense of vocation. It is then perhaps that we are taught that to be about our Father's business is the glory of human life. It is because we have not used the great gift of Fortitude which then came to us, that we have so often failed in the long discipline of home and school, and have missed the joyous impulse of the Divine vision, and now look back upon a lost vocation.

Nothing but the vision of God can hold us to His purpose. It is because Jesus realised His Sonship that He was able to offer to the Father a life of perfect filial obedience. We need to set more evidently before our children the glory of God, to make His majesty and His sovereign love greater realities to them in daily life, to appeal continually and with conviction to the privilege and power of sonship which are theirs by the grace of the font. And then the service of God becomes an ideal of glory and an inspiration, which will carry them through the probationary obediences and unromantic discipline of home and school, and will bring them with trained wills and high hopes and steadfast endurance to that last fulfilment of the Divine Will, which in the mind of God has ever been the crowning purpose of their life.

Pray that we may realise our vocation.

Almighty and most merciful God, Who in the eternal decrees of Thy love hast planned the purpose of our lives, grant that by the teaching of the Holy Ghost we may learn Thy Holy Will and give ourselves obediently to fulfil our vocation. May the grace of the Holy Spirit purge us from all indolence, illumine our minds, purify our hearts and quicken our wills, that we may cheerfully accomplish those things which Thou wouldest have done, and adorn the doctrine of Christ our Saviour in all things, to the glory of Thy Holy Name.

C.

"How is it that ye sought Me?" Mary had indeed suffered agonies of sorrow in anxiety for the Child Jesus, and the answer of Jesus is a tender remonstrance at the implied charge of neglect and want of thought in leaving His Mother. He recalls her to the mystery upon which she has so often pondered. He has been so long with her that she begins to claim Him as her own, with all the wistful selfishness of a mother's love. Often she must have wondered in what way His life would be different from that of others, and have thought of Simeon's words about the sword that should pierce her heart. But up till now it had been a normal life, a life, indeed, of quiet beauty and tender affection, of manifest promise and power; but there had been

nothing to break in upon the usual healthy and ordered development of a young child's life. And thus she began to count Him more than ever her own. The visit to the Temple, with the three days' loss of Jesus, recalled her to the possibilities of separation, and pointed to the way along which her path of sacrifice might lie. It reminded her that the claim of the Divine Father came first. She had known it, she was striving to be ready for it, but she hoped it might not come yet. She did not rebel. She understood and acquiesced with the true obedience of the handmaid of the Lord. As she saw her Child standing there in the midst of the rabbis, and marked the wonder of the great teachers at His understanding and answers, Mary felt once more how precious beyond words was the treasure which God had given her. And at that very moment the shadow of separation passed over her.

Jesus must be about His Father's business. He Himself was conscious of His call. It was no longer the Mother's secret. He already knew, and spoke of it now with calm assurance. Mary recognised the leading of God, and prepared herself for sacrifice. But the sacrifice was not yet. God gave her Child back to her. Jesus went down with Joseph and Mary to Nazareth, and was subject unto them. The old life was resumed, only it was touched now with a newly-realised spirit of dedication. As Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature, and in favour with

God and man, each step prepared Mary anew for the great sacrifice which should be hers, so that, when the final agony came, and the crisis of the three years' separation was reached, the Virgin Mother could stand bravely at the foot of the Cross.

Is it not so in our own lives also? There are lighter crosses which God gives us to bear, that we may be ready for the heavier. Each suffering that comes may be God's revelation to us of sacrifice as the principle of victory and of life. Again and again we claim entire possession of that which is really His. The gift is entrusted to us, to use, to train for His glory. It may be a child, it may be a special possession of wealth or opportunity, or some special faculty or aptitude of hand or heart or brain. In the depth of our soul we know that the supreme claim over all that we have lies with God. But so entirely does He entrust it to our care and direction that we are ready to regard it as indeed our own. We lose sight of what God's purpose in it may be, as we continue undisturbed in our own enjoyment of His blessing. And then there comes a moment when God takes the government out of our hands. A sudden crisis reveals His claim. Failure, disappointment, suffering, anxiety, loss—these are the means by which we are recalled to the path of sacrifice. "The Father's business" claims what we were selfishly appropri-

ating to our own happiness. We really knew it all the while, but habit had dulled our vision. We are recalled at once to our true joy as co-operators with God through sacrifice. And when we yield Him what is His, He may give it back to us to use and enjoy still, with new insight and growing readiness for new sacrifice. We need to recognise the discipline of the little trials of life as the call of God to sit lightly to all sense of possession and self-centred regard. Such a spirit of realised detachment strengthens and braces the soul for the great crises of sorrow, when only a surrendered heart, a will trained to endurance, and a mind set upon the glory of God, can take up the Cross and follow after Jesus. For this daily discipline of the Cross we must learn to thank God, Who is ever faithful, and will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able, but will with the temptation make a way to escape that we may be able to bear it.

D.

"How is it that ye sought Me?" How often it is that Jesus might say those words to us as we tell Him of our sorrow and anxiety. We had no need to be anxious. We should have known where to find Him. We suffer perplexities of doubt to hide Him from our view, when we have never really sought the illumination of the Holy Spirit, nor made

serious or devout study of His Revelation. We complain that our faith brings us no comfort in the hour of sudden stress and sorrow, when we have never really made the Creed our own. We have not used it as the daily expression of our renewed trust in God, nor sought in it the interpretation of each day's fresh experience, nor brought our life up to the level of its joyful confidence in the love of God, which achieves victory through suffering, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.

"How is it that ye sought Me?" We have known Him in the lowliness of the Incarnation, and yet we refuse to recognise Him in the lowliness of His approach to us in Revelation and in Sacrament. Men come perplexed and sorrowful from the facts of human error and the slow progress of the gradual moral instruction of the chosen people of God which the modern study of the Bible reveals. They seem to have lost Jesus. Yet what else should they seek, who know the Incarnate, but an Inspiration which, while it preserves and safeguards the integrity of the spiritual truth of God's message, does not destroy the reality of the human element, with its limitations of knowledge and experience and its liability to error in memory and understanding?

Men are anxious and sorrowing and sad about their powerlessness, their lack of spiritual vision, their ineffective witness, and their sense of de-

pressing hopelessness. They complain of the absence of God in the sphere of human life, when they have never sought Him in the profound lowliness of His sacramental Presence. How many, indeed, are the sorrows, anxieties, and cares in the smaller things of life which are due to our refusal to recognise the Incarnate in the lowliness of His self-manifestation. He is about the Father's business in the Father's appointed way. And that way has been revealed to us in the veiled glory of His coming at Bethlehem. But we are slow to recognise a Presence so lowly in its methods, so hidden in its working, so intimate in its approach. In all our sorrowing search and agony of grief and fear the tender rebuke of Jesus stirs us to new faith, and rallies our hesitating allegiance to the ways of God. "How is it that ye sought Me?"

Resolve to use to the full the knowledge which you already have of the ways of God.

Realise how indolent we are in our search after God. Make an act of sorrow for the wilful neglect to use the knowledge which we have of the ways of God. Think of the Bible so little read, so seldom studied, so ineffective as a revelation to us of God. Think of the instruction in the Faith which we have forgotten so readily, and have never sought to recall. Think of the sacramental life, so weak, so irregular, so uncertain. Think of the Altar in His Father's House where we know He is to be found, but where we have not sought Him.

Think of the prayers which might have led us into His Presence, but have never been said. Think of the obedience which we have refused, and of the power of the blessed Spirit of God Whom we have grieved by wilful disobedience, so that we have lost the vision of Jesus. Resolve to live up to the highest that you know, and use fully the powers and opportunities that you have, knowing that then God the Holy Spirit will lead you on from grace to grace and keep you ever close to Jesus.

X

THE BAPTISM

S. Luke iii. 1–22; iv. 1–13.

AT length the long period of quiet probation was over, and Jesus moved out from the peace of Nazareth at the call of the Spirit to begin His public work. We know nothing of what Jesus said to His Virgin Mother to prepare her for the trial that was to come. Probably as the years had passed, and the intimacy between them in spiritual things had deepened, she had gathered much of the purpose and mind of her Son. She had watched the growing urgency of the impulse of the Spirit. Jesus would not have left her unprepared. It must have been His own labour that made provision for all her wants. And He had sought to impart to her what He could of the great mission to which the Father called Him.

She could not understand it fully. But she could acquiesce, though presently the suffering which He endured, and the taunts of madness with which His "brethren" assailed Him, drew her from the seclusion which He had marked out for her. It is

easy sometimes to plan a way of sacrifice and bind oneself beforehand to its acceptance. It is hard, when the urgency of suffering is upon us, to bear it without faltering. So Mary may have accepted the separation as Jesus unfolded to her the way of sacrifice to which the Father called her, but when His ministry was beset with such persecution, and bewildering rumours reached her of the suffering of her Son and dangers gathered round Him, love impelled her to intervene. That was but for a moment. At the guidance of His desire she was content that the restraining hand of human motherhood should not be laid upon the progress of His redemptive work. So the Mother sped forth her Son upon His suffering way, and save for a brief visit, in which He bore unavailing witness before His own fellow-villagers of the Divine mission to which He was called, Nazareth saw Him no more.

A.

While Jesus "advanced in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man" in the fellowship of home and the companionships of Nazareth, the herald who was to proclaim His coming had been preparing for his own prophetic work in the solitudes of the desert. The discipline of silent communion with God, apart from the brotherhood of men, in the rugged spaces of the wilderness equipped John

Baptist with a stern simplicity, a penetrating vision, and a vigour of address, which brought all Judæa and Jerusalem round him, when he broke the silence of his retreat and began his preaching of repentance. The suddenness of his coming, the wildness of his figure, the courage of his denunciation, the convincing earnestness of his appeal, the stern demand for righteousness so imperiously made, brought all classes to his feet. The latent hope of the coming of the Messiah, which bound all ranks together in one common devotion, was kindled into new flame. "Behold the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Men recognised the need of moral reformation as the starting-point of any corporate effort. There were rampant evils of corruption, hypocrisy, violence, and greed which were undermining the foundations of Jewish national life. The stern call to personal holiness found ready and numerous response. Public baptism attested the sincerity of those who were ready to take their part in the establishment of the new kingdom.

The heart of the nation was moved. The official leaders of religion in Jerusalem, taking formal note of the new movement, asked for the credentials of the prophet. He was not self-appointed to this task. His authority really lay in One Who was to come after him, Whose way he was preparing. He was not himself the expected Prophet. He was but a voice heralding the true

Prophet, before whose mission his own work paled in importance and in power. At His coming the Forerunner would sink back into the obscurity from which he came. "He must increase, but I must decrease." "Even now there standeth One among you whom ye know not. He it is who coming after me is preferred before me; for He was before me." But when would He come, and how shall His kingdom stand? Such questions it did not become the Baptist to answer. His only work was to point men to the coming King. It would be the mission of Jesus to explain the foundation of the kingdom.

So the Baptist speaks of the Person of the King. He is God; not only superior in dignity to the Forerunner, so that He is preferred before him, but He has a pre-existence to which the Baptist bears witness. "He was before me." "I saw and bare record that this is the Son of God." There had been no personal knowledge which had led the Baptist to undertake this ministry of the Forerunner. "I knew Him not." His own mission was given him by God. "But that He should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water." And so God had revealed Jesus to him as He came for His own baptism, and he could speak of Him as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

When he had introduced to his disciples One Who

was God and should redeem Israel from all his sins, the Baptist's work was done. The friend of the bridegroom could not usurp the place of the bridegroom himself. When he had borne the bridegroom's message to the bride, the friend of the bridegroom had fulfilled his mission. So the Baptist was true to the terms of his vocation. He had prepared an audience for Jesus. He did not anticipate the message of Jesus Himself, nor declare His methods nor foretell His plans. Wisdom would be justified of all her children. Jesus would vindicate His own purpose and reveal His own way of salvation. With self-regardless humility the Baptist withdrew, taking joy in the passing of his own disciples to be the followers of Jesus, and rejoicing in the report that was brought to him: "Rabbi, He that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth and all men come to Him."

It must have seemed strange to others besides John Baptist, that One for whom such startling and such eager preparation had been made should be so reticent and so slow in assuming the position, which public expectation had been aroused to welcome. But Jesus knew what was in man. The Baptist had called out of the nation all that was best. Round him had gathered those who had the highest ideals of righteousness and the surest faith in the promises of God. But they were still under the

influence of a misleading conception of what the Kingdom of God should be. Even the Baptist himself was not free from misunderstanding. Out of those thus prepared for Him Jesus would sift those to whom the revelation of the spiritual character of the kingdom might be made, and to these He would make Himself known in the intimacy of personal affection and daily fellowship. To have assumed at once the title of Messiah, to have made public proclamation of His Kingship, would have sanctioned all the false and worldly conceptions which had gathered round the name. He must first lead the disciples by His spiritual teaching to understand the true character of His work, and train them first to recognise the truth of His Deity. It was the great trial of the Baptist that his vigorous preaching of the kingdom was followed by an inauguration so secret and so humble. But he received from Christ the assurance that his mission had not failed. He had fulfilled his vocation perfectly.

This is perhaps the peculiar glory of the Baptist. He sets before us to-day the example of a great vocation fully realised and truly achieved. From childhood he knew his vocation. He trained himself for it rigorously by long years of self-discipline and uninterrupted communion with God. He fulfilled it strictly. He was not led away by any temptation to exceed the scope of his mission. He

lost himself in the glory of Another. And those are just the conditions which we would see fulfilled in the attainment of our own vocation.

Pray that we may follow the example of the Baptist.

Almighty God, by whose providence Thy servant John Baptist was wonderfully born, and sent to prepare the way of Thy Son our Saviour by preaching of repentance, make us so to follow his doctrine and holy life, that we may truly repent according to his preaching, and after his example constantly speak the truth, boldly rebuke vice, and patiently suffer for the truth's sake, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

B.

"Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad Him, saying, I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered Him." The baptism of Jesus brought both a revelation to Himself and an endowment to our own humanity. It was for Jesus the culminating point of the Spirit's witness in His manhood to the work to which He was called. It was the open and distinct confirmation, with all the definiteness of outward testimony, of the Divine mission of which Jesus was conscious. It was

neither the first union of the Godhead and the manhood, as the false teaching of early days supposed, nor yet the first gift of the Spirit to His manhood. From the first moment of the Conception His humanity had been gifted with the Spirit. Manhood can never be perfect without the fellowship of the indwelling Spirit. By the terms of his creation man was not meant to be independent nor self-sufficing. He was always to be dependent upon God, a creature who needed the continual fellowship of God to make Him perfect. Thus the perfect Man, for all His sinlessness, could not stand by Himself apart from God. He needed the inspiration of the Holy Ghost to sanctify and complete His manhood. From the very beginning the Holy Ghost was His, and that without measure.

Through the days of boyhood and early manhood the Holy Ghost had been the perpetual guide of His human life, revealing to His soul the things of God, interpreting to Him the call of the Father, equipping His manhood at every stage of development for perfect obedience to the Divine Will. In the power of the Spirit Jesus had risen to full consciousness of His Divine Sonship, and of the mission to which He was called. And now He knew, through the Spirit, that the hour had come for His manifestation to the world. With resolute purpose He left Nazareth and came to the Baptist in the wilderness of Judæa. He would accept the baptism of John,

not that He had sins to repent of, for He was sinless, but as a formal declaration of His purpose of righteousness, as a mark of humility, and that He might show His fellowship with mankind, stooping to all the ordinances which God had blessed for the quickening of the spiritual life of man. The Baptist, guided by the Spirit, recognised Jesus as He came, and sought himself the baptism of his Successor, but Jesus set his request aside. "Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." It was the culmination of the very work to which John was called, and of the obedience of Jesus as perfect Man to the Will of God. So the righteous purpose of God was fulfilled in the obedience of His prophet and His Son.

It was the crowning moment of the ministry of the Baptist. "All the people were baptized." A pause had come in the work of baptizing. All that would respond to the call of the prophet had now received the baptism of John. His work was drawing to its close. God had manifestly blessed his ministry. He could look back with humble and unselfish gladness upon the restoration of many souls to newness of life and the awakening of many to new hope. Faithfully he had prepared the way. And now the Lord came to set His seal upon the work of His Forerunner, and to crown the work which he had done.

Silently Jesus stood beside the Baptist, and at

his bidding dipped beneath the waters of the Jordan, for ever sanctifying water to the mystical washing away of sin. Then, as He rose in prayer, "the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well pleased." Thus John saw the confirmation of his hopes, and Jesus received in His manhood the anointing of the Holy Spirit for the work to which He was now called.

To no one else was the inauguration of the Messiah revealed. The vision of the opened heaven, the descent of the Holy Ghost in bodily shape like a dove, was no startling and splendid manifestation intended to impress the crowds of the baptized with the sudden advent of the promised King. That was never Christ's way. To Jesus and to John alone was the revelation made after the Baptism. The Baptist was assured that his ministry had been truly fulfilled, and that He Whose coming he had so faithfully heralded was the very Son of God. And Jesus entered upon His work with the deepened consciousness of His Divine Sonship, and with that sacramental evidence of the presence and power of the anointing Spirit, which was designed by God to give certainty and assurance to the creaturely weakness of human nature. It was not, indeed, for Himself, but for us whom He represented, that He received this

outpouring of the Spirit. The manhood of Jesus was to be the very medium of our own consecration by the Spirit. The Man Christ Jesus was to be the source and fount to mankind of the Spirit's inspiration. Through His sacred humanity, raised to the fulness of glory through the Resurrection and Ascension, it would be His one day to "give gifts unto men" and impart to us the gift of the Holy Spirit. Thus did He receive the Spirit "without measure" in His perfect manhood, that of His fulness we might all receive.

It was indeed as the Baptist had said: "One mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose. He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." John realised that to his symbolic baptism of repentance there would succeed, in the ministry of the new kingdom, a baptism of effective grace, which should be an actual impartation of the Holy Spirit to the souls of men. For Jesus chose the very outward means which the Baptist had used, to be the effectual sacrament of the bestowal of the grace of the Holy Spirit, linking with it those words which declare the wonder of that new fellowship with God which the sacrament creates: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." But that ministry of the Holy Spirit could not be yet. Only when Jesus was glorified could the sacraments of the Incarnate have effective grace. But by His

own Baptism Jesus sanctified the element of water for its future use as the sacramental means of the washing away of human sin. "According to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost."

Pray that we may use the grace of our Baptism.

Almighty and ever-loving God, Who hast saved us by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, grant that we may so stir up the gift of grace which Thou hast bestowed upon us at the font, that all carnal affections may die in us, and all things belonging to the Spirit may live and grow in us, that we may have power and strength to have victory and to triumph against the devil, the world, and the flesh, and being endued with heavenly virtues may be everlastingly rewarded through Thy mercy, O blessed Lord God, Who dost live and govern all things, world without end.

C.

That the Baptism marked in Jesus a new stage in His consciousness of Divine Sonship is confirmed by the nature of the Temptation which immediately followed. The same Spirit, Who had developed and cherished that consciousness, now led the Man Christ Jesus into the wilderness of Temptation. And the different temptations, manifold and various as they were in appearance, were in essence always the same. Jesus was asked in

each case to use the powers of Divine Sonship in such a way that the reality of His human experience should be impaired. With the uprising of that new consciousness fresh upon Him, Jesus would have welcomed the retreat into the solitude of the wilderness, as a needed opportunity to meditate upon the nature of the work which lay before Him. The call of the Father sounded clearly in His ears and drew Him on. "Thou art My beloved Son. In Thee I am well pleased." The vision of His work opened to His gaze. The more He realised its conditions, whichever way He looked, the more surely He saw the royal highway of the Cross stretching out before Him.

A life of obedience meant a life of suffering, a life of sacrifice. If He should be true to His mission, it would be an obedience even unto death. If He kept Himself within the reality of human experience, if He should not transgress the true limits of perfect manhood, if He did not allow the powers of His Godhead to temper and alleviate the suffering and sorrow and pain to which His human nature exposed Him, there could be no issue but the Passion and the Cross for such a sinless life. If He impaired the truth of His human experience, manhood could not be redeemed. It could only be through a true human obedience that the effects of the primal disobedience of man could be done away. The victory over sin and death must be won in the

fulness of our human nature, else were we no partakers in His victory.

Thus as the days of solitude passed in the wilderness, Jesus, led by the Spirit, entered more and more into the meaning of His approaching ministry, and in the power of the Spirit He bound Himself to obedience. The vision lay clear before Him. But no temptation could daunt His purpose. It would be a life of bodily suffering. Poverty and hunger would be His frequent companions. Yet He would work no miracles to save Himself from the agonies of bodily pain. In the clear light of the Spirit's revelation, He saw that this was the Will of the Father. "My meat is to do the Will of Him that sent me and to finish His work." There can be no other way for the perfect Man. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

He was the Son of God, and yet the life to which He was giving Himself would be a life of perpetual misunderstanding. Men would not recognise His Deity. The method of revelation to which He was dedicating Himself would mean a tedious ministry and few disciples. The spiritual appeal which He was purposing would most frequently fail, and in all cases for its success would need abundant leisure and infinite devotion. He saw this clearly in the power of the Spirit. Yet He would work no startling miracle to demonstrate His Deity, nor

seek to compel belief by any prodigy or wonder. He might indeed soar up to the highest pinnacle of the Temple, and from thence hurl Himself down, and, gliding down unhurt upon the worshippers below, stand revealed as God. But that was not the Will of the Father. It was His to bear witness of the Father's love by a patient ministry of teaching. It was not Himself but the Father Whom He came to reveal. "As my Father hath taught Me, I speak these things." His was to be the experience of every true prophet of God. "Son of Man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against Me. And thou shalt speak My words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, for they are most rebellious." So Jesus bound Himself to renounce all startling appeals to men's wonder and ignorance, and went forward undauntedly to His mission, pledged to use only the highest and most spiritual weapons of holiness, truth, and love for the gradual conversion of the world.

Then there passed before His eyes the vision of the world in all its glorious wealth of pomp and greatness. These kingdoms of the world were to be the kingdoms of the Christ. Was there no way but the tedious and painful way of the Passion and the Cross? Might they not be won by some gentle compliance to the prejudices of the world, by some momentary compromise with the

truth, some polite accommodation of the standard of absolute righteousness to their special needs, some lowering of the ideal of holiness? Might not some sacrifice to evil be a wise and worthy price to pay for their speedy allegiance? Might not the world, thus won, be trained to higher ways, and become indeed the kingdom of God? True to the vision of holiness which the Spirit held before His soul, Jesus turned with aversion from thoughts so dishonouring to the glory of God. At whatever cost, His life was to bear witness to the holiness of God. It was the power of the Spirit so newly realised that would enable Him to bear that witness in the sinlessness of a perfect human life. By no other way could the world be eventually won to the service of God. It would be a way of death, because all the tyrannous powers of evil which then had mastery in the world would rise against the Sinless One. It could be only the blood of Christ, offering Himself through the eternal Spirit without spot to God, that would purge the conscience of the world from dead works to serve the living God.

Thus in the wilderness there passed before the gaze of Jesus the vision of the work to which His Baptism had called Him. From the beginning His eyes rested steadfastly upon the Cross. Nothing could turn Him from the Passion. As the days passed and dangers thickened, as friends failed and

foes grew more persistent, He felt increasingly that He had yet a baptism to be baptized with, and that He was straitened till it be accomplished. But even so, that passionate desire for the Cross of our salvation waited in obedience upon the Will of the Father, which in the crisis of the wilderness temptation had been revealed as the guide and glory of the perfect human life.

So Jesus indeed suffered, being tempted, leaving us an example that we should follow in His steps. It is well, therefore, for us, if at each moment of fresh spiritual grace and enlightenment, we suffer ourselves to be led by the Spirit into some place of retreat, that we may realise in solitude the mission to which God is calling us, and in the struggle with evil may conquer ourselves in the power of the Spirit, that with resolute purpose and clear-eyed vision we may set our feet upon the way of the Cross, in single-hearted obedience to the Will of the Father, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord.

Pray that we may be ready to forsake self and follow Jesus in the way of the Cross.

O Loving Saviour, Who didst give Thyself for our sakes to die upon the Cross that the Will of the Father for our salvation might be fulfilled, grant that we may be so strengthened by the grace of the Holy Spirit, that overcoming all the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, we

may give ourselves to Thy obedience and may follow faithfully along the way of the Cross in the happy fellowship of Thy love, Who art our Creator, our Redeemer, our Example, our Hope, and our exceeding great Reward.

XI

THE FIRST MIRACLE

S. John ii. 1–11.

"THIS beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth His glory; and His disciples believed on Him." The glory of Bethlehem was now to be manifested to the world, and the marriage festival of the friend's home at Cana was chosen as the appropriate occasion of the entrance of Jesus upon His public ministry of miracle and teaching. S. John is careful to give an implicit denial to the stories of early prodigy and wonder which adorned the apocryphal legends of Christ's infancy. At Cana was the beginning of miracles. None had preceded this manifestation at Cana of Galilee. Jesus, leaving His own home, bestows His first benediction upon a home at which His Mother was a welcomed guest. This first miracle of Jesus reveals the principle and purpose which underlie all His miracles, discloses the benediction which He loves to bestow upon all the happinesses of home, and typifies the way in which His work is to transfigure all the weakness

and poverty of human life with the excellence of His eternal glory.

A.

Jesus, returning victorious from the wilderness of the Temptation to begin His public ministry, had gathered to Him at once His first disciples. From the followers of the Baptist He had called to Him S. Andrew and S. John. S. John records the story of that memorable day, when, arrested by the cry of the Baptist, "Behold the Lamb of God," he had turned with S. Andrew to follow Jesus as He walked. He could remember the gaze of Jesus as He "turned and beheld them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye?" From that moment he counted his discipleship begun. They spent the long day with Jesus, and they knew the call had come for which the Baptist had prepared them.

S. Andrew brought his brother Simon to receive the welcome of the Messiah. And Jesus Himself, moving back to Galilee on the morrow, "findeth Philip." And "Philip findeth Nathanael." "And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee. And the mother of Jesus was there. And Jesus also was bidden, and His disciples, to the marriage." Thus it was near to His own home, and in the presence of His own Mother, that Jesus performed the first miracle, which was to usher in His public ministry and part Him for ever from the happiness and peace of the home at

Nazareth. He was amongst friends. Mary moves in the house as one who shares the intimate secrets of the home, who knows its poverty, and helps to make the most of its resources. It was a joy to her that her Son had come. His presence not only shed gladness but brought strength. He would know not to embarrass the simple resources of the home. She could rely always on His sympathy and His help. She was not surprised when word came to her that the wine had failed. Instinctively the Mother of Jesus turned to her Son. He would know what to do.

Perhaps she could not say what she actually expected Him to do, but she felt that He would bring relief, and lift the threatened shadow of disgrace from those who were responsible for the happiness of the feast. "When the wine failed, the Mother of Jesus saith unto Him, They have no wine. And Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come." It seemed a difficult reply, but the faith of Mary was not baffled. "His Mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." At the moment when Mary spoke to her Son He had received no intimation of the Divine Will that the hour had come for Him to manifest the glory which He knew to be His. It was only in obedience to the Will of the Father that these "signs" could be wrought. Jesus waited upon

the Will of God and the impulse of the Spirit. Perhaps the very faith of Mary hastened the hour of His self-revelation to the world, for hardly had His Mother spoken to the servants, when He bade them fill the great water-pots with water, and immediately draw out the water in the drinking vessels and bear it unto the ruler of the feast. "And when the ruler of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and knew not whence it was (but the servants which had drawn the water knew), the ruler of the feast calleth the bridegroom, and saith unto him, Every man setteth on first the good wine, and, when men have drunk freely, then that which is worse; thou hast kept the good wine until now." So the happiness of the wedding-feast was unclouded. The Son of Man, in the very act of giving up His own home for the public ministry upon which He was entering, poured His benediction upon the new home which His Mother's friends were making.

It is significant that the first public act, and almost the last uttered word of Jesus, are alike a consecration of home. Here in this miracle He blessed the home-making of those who had just been united in the bonds of holy marriage, as they started upon the new life of wedded fellowship. Upon the Cross He looked down upon His Mother, left desolate by His death, and made for her a new home under the care of the beloved apostle: "Woman, behold thy son. Behold thy mother."

He Who was the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief chose as the first public act of His ministry the benediction of human happiness and joy. His presence at the wedding-feast at Cana sets the Divine approval upon all the innocent joys of human life. Life was meant to be a joyful thing. Sin alone can take the gladness out of life. And Jesus came to take away sin, that the primal joy which God in His love had ever purposed for man might be achieved.

We need to regain this spirit of joy. Sin alone can destroy it. But if, in the midst of our many sorrows, we are really to be glad at heart, we must set joy steadily before us as God's true ideal for our lives, and expect His blessing upon all our gladness. We must recognise that joy, the fixed habit of joy, is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Love, joy, peace—these are the first fruits of His indwelling. Without His help, joy can find no abiding place in our life, and without His Presence no reasonable place in our religion. As the Spirit interprets to us the things of Jesus, the Presence of Christ at Cana gives the Divine sanction to all the innocent festivals which gladden human life. The critical eyes of the Pharisees noted how Jesus showed in His life a spirit of glad fellowship, which the Baptist had solemnly eschewed, and they feared His sympathy with the simple joys of life. But Jesus had brought to earth the eternal bliss of the Godhead, and by His victory over sin He

made a place in human life for happiness and joy. In the first days of Christianity it was this spirit of sincere gladness and happy fellowship in social joy that proved so attractive to the heathen world. Christianity brought not the prohibition but the purification of all happy feasts, not the banning but the benediction of all the social festivals of home and friendship.

The memory of Cana will always teach us to use aright our opportunities of happy leisure, and enable us to infuse a spirit of deep gladness and reverent joy into all the varied experiences of social intercourse with which our life abounds. It should be the part of every devout believer to make his influence felt in ways of happiness and joy. Instinctively the disciple of Christ sheds gladness round his path, and blesses the little festivals of love and friendship to which he is called, with the grace of happy gladness and sincere delight. That, after all, is the true spirit of Christ. And we must seek to make it our own, that we may be bearers of joy to those who know not Christ, who have perchance been turned from the path of discipleship by the dull gloom and heaviness of those who bear indeed the name of Christ, but have not really shared His Spirit.

It is in the home that this Christian spirit of joy must be learned. Home is God's first school of happiness, for there is His promised benediction, and

there are the God-given relationships of mutual love and affection, which afford natural scope for the development of all our activities of happiness and joy. It is from the happy home that the most powerful influence for good proceeds. So Jesus blessed the home, not for its own sake only, that it might be gladdened by His benediction, but that from it there might radiate forth to the dark world beyond the saving influence of true Christian happiness.

Pray for the gift of joy.

O Holy and Blessed Spirit of God, Whose indwelling brings the fruit of joy into our lives, fill us with the gladness of God, that we may rejoice in all His works and take pleasure in all His ways. Grant that by the happiness of our lives we may commend the faith of Christ to all men, singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who with Thee and the eternal Father liveth and reigneth, one God, world without end.

B.

"This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee." Miracle was one of the ways by which Jesus designed to manifest His glory. The miracles of Christ were not startling exhibitions of supernatural power, but manifestations of personal glory. They revealed the character of God and

the perfection of Man. They were the natural expression of the love and wisdom and power of One Who is God, coming to the aid of our weak human nature. They were "signs," "works," the signs which reveal holiness and love, the works which are the natural outcome of Divine energy manifested in the presence of human weakness and sin. They are not mere exhibitions of magic and monstrous power, such as the pagan world delighted in. Such prodigies might indeed be an evidence of spiritual and supernatural power, but they would not be the work of God. There is a spiritual power of evil which has its own manifestations of wonder, which are not of God. The reality of those chaotic and capricious powers of evil, and the marvellous and inexplicable nature of their working, are known to those who deal with the occult.

But the miracles of Christ have a moral purpose. They are worthy of a God Who is both Holiness and Love. They are sacraments of the Divine working, revealing the compassion, justice, mercy, and love of the Supreme God. They are the expression both of the Deity of Christ and of His perfect Manhood. Jesus manifests both the omnipotence of the Divine Will, supreme in its spiritual purpose over all creation, and the sovereignty of the human will, sinless and obedient at all points to the Will of the Creator. The Personality of Jesus is unique in its significance, because He is not only God, but is also true and

perfect Man. His Manhood wields the new and unknown power of utter sinlessness. We have no measure nor standard of the power which a sinless humanity may exert. God, we know, exercises supreme and almighty power over the things of nature, bending them to His Sovereign Will. And we know that the Divine Will is directed towards ends that are spiritual, so that the material forces of nature work together for some far-off Divine event, which will be the supreme manifestation of the glory of God. We can realise that man in unbroken, sinless obedience to God may be in such perfect accord with the Divine Will that he too may wield a sovereign influence over the things of nature. Both these wills met in the Person of Christ. His was the supreme Will of God, His too was the strong power of a sinless human will.

We can understand, then, the miracles of Christ as the inevitable result of a sinless manhood worn by the very Son of God Himself. Significant is the tone and impression of authority which all His miracles convey. They were not tentative nor uncertain. They never failed. They were definite in their purpose, deliberately restricted in their application, sure in their effects. The economy which Jesus practised in their use is evidence of the purpose which He meant His miracles to serve. It was a spiritual revelation of the character of God which they disclosed. They

were part of Christ's revelation of the Father, while they also attested His authority and sanction as a "teacher come from God." They were one of the means by which, fulfilling the Will of the Father, Jesus made His advent known and drew attention to His Person.

The Baptist had arrested attention by his ascetic figure and the novelty of his appeal in the wilderness. Very different had been Christ's entry upon His work. It was not to the many, but to the few that He made His appeal. But even the few could not be reached by teaching only. The teaching of Jesus was too spiritual, too exacting in its ideals, too subversive of all expectation, for many to understand. So He offered His miracles as the fresh attestation which the minds of His hearers needed, that they might realise something of His Divine Personality and give heed to His words. So Nicodemus felt drawn to some deeper apprehension of His authority. "We know that Thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him."

And Jesus allowed that miracles had this place in His teaching as proofs of His mission. There was the witness of the Baptist. There was the witness of His own perfect character, the moral beauty of His own life. If these failed to prove His Divine mission, then there were His miracles. "I told you and ye believed not. The works that I do in My

Father's name, they bear witness of Me. I have greater witness than that of John. For the works which My Father hath given Me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of Me that the Father hath sent Me."

That was their purpose, to disclose the character and authority of the Divine Son Whom the Father had sent. They were meant to bring men into the Presence of God. They failed as a whole in their appeal, because the Jews were not looking for God. The miracles never aroused in their souls a sense of the Divine Presence. A few among those that were healed came to the deeper insight, which love and faith can give, and attaining some conception of God in Jesus gave themselves up to Him. But where there was no spiritual desire, no miracles, however frequent and wonderful, could compel belief. Bethsaida and Chorazin were witnesses of that. Most of the people looked no further than the satisfaction of their bodily needs. They wanted their sufferings relieved, their hunger satisfied, their limbs made whole. They had no higher hopes, no longing to be freed from the thraldom of sin, no perception of the Divine beauty of Christ's life. Only to those who had eyes to see, the miracles were a manifestation of His glory.

And that glory is not the Divine splendour and irresistible power, but the Holiness, the Love, the

Justice, and the Perfection of God, which are revealed through the sinless Humanity of the Incarnate. That glory Jesus reveals to us to-day, not by the immediate acts of healing and power which marked the miracles of His ministry, but by the ordered government of the world under the control of steadfast laws which we know to be the expression of the Divine Will, and by the manifestation of His fellowship in the Sacraments of the Church, by which our spiritual life is strengthened and our souls made responsive to His Presence.

The Christian, like S. Paul, does not need such proofs and witnesses of the Divine glory in Christ as the miracles of the Gospel offered to the disciples of Jesus. He has the experience of personal communion with Christ. He knows by individual experience that Jesus is the living God, wielding a unique supremacy over human life. Jesus is the satisfaction of all human desires, and all the deepest aspirations of the soul find complete fulfilment in Him.

It seems, indeed, to the faithful believer but a little thing that One so strong to save, so powerful to deliver, so mighty to help, should show Himself a healer of disease, a ruler of nature, Lord of the storm and Victor over death. The Presence of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist is a miracle more wonderful than the Feeding of the Multitudes in the wilderness. The re-creation of souls by the absolution of God, the re-making of

lives by the gift of Divine grace, the arousal of new and vital energies by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, the equipment of weak and faltering manhood for the high tasks of noble sacrifice and spiritual achievement to which God has called us—these are the miracles of Christ in human life to-day. It is not by startling and abnormal acts which transcend the ordinary experience of the course of nature, but by the daily miracle of His sustaining grace, His Divine protection, His merciful forgiveness, His all-embracing love, that Jesus manifests forth His glory to-day. It is so that we, His disciples, learn to believe on Him.

Thank God for the wonders of His grace.

O Almighty and Eternal God, glorious in holiness and in power, Whose delights are with the sons of men, we thank and praise Thy Holy Name for the manifold wonders of Thy grace, with which our lives are enriched. For the fellowship of Thy Holy Spirit, for the new birth of Baptism, for the strength of Confirmation, for the joy of Absolution, for the grace of the Altar, for all the ministrations of Thy Holy Church, for the revelation of Thy Holy Word, for the hope of glory, for the souls of men sustained in suffering and redeemed from sin, and for all Thy miracles of love and power, we give thanks unto Thee, O Lord, with all our hearts. Marvellous are Thy works. Thy mercy is greater than the heavens, and Thy truth reacheth unto the clouds. Thou art great and doest wondrous things. Thou art God alone.

C.

The miracle at Cana of Galilee is the first of seven miracles which S. John has chosen to record out of the many of which he had been witness during the three years of his Master's ministry. There is evident significance in the choice which the Evangelist has made. The four short Gospels are not the piecing together of a few meagre and scattered fragments of the story of Christ's life which survived in the memories of the next generation, but they represent the careful selection, out of an abundant material, of those particular incidents and sayings, which were needed in order to present one special aspect of the Master's life and teaching. There are deliberate marks of careful design in the selection and arrangement of material in all the Gospels.

And this is especially true of the Gospel of S. John, for here the author was in a position of unusual privilege with regard to his choice of narrative. Not only had he enjoyed special intimacy with Jesus, but there were certain great incidents in the Master's life, which had already been recorded in the other three Gospels, and which needed not to be repeated. S. John therefore enjoyed peculiar freedom of choice, and his Gospel shows the most clear marks of careful design. The few miracles which he records have

for him a typical value. In recalling this first miracle of Jesus and setting it in its place at the forefront of His public ministry, S. John doubtless regarded it as typical of all Christ's ministry and work. The work of Jesus is to manifest forth His glory by turning the water of human frailty and despair into the wine of strength and happiness and splendid achievement.

Christ has transfigured life; all its values are changed. It is He alone that gives real worth to life and all life holds. He has made that which is temporal shine with the glory of the eternal. That is the result of the Incarnation. Jesus brought heaven to earth. The gloom and darkness of earth are lit up with the light that streams from the lowly cradle of Bethlehem. Jesus has transfigured all the work of life, for He has worked. He has touched the small details of life with the new dignity of eternal consequence. His entrance into the world was the introduction into human life of a new power, which reinforced our manhood at all points and made it adequate to all its responsibilities and tasks. Life became a richer thing, because its opportunities were enlarged and its horizon widened.

Already the high hopes and ideals of the ancient world had begun to wane before repeated failure. There was a general sense of effeteness,

inefficiency, and despair. There seemed no vital power that could regenerate society or make life worth living. The wisdom of the Greeks, with its unsatisfied search after truth, had arrived at no certain conclusion, and offered theories of life either so contradictory or so hesitating that they could give no strong and steady stimulus for any sustained effort of the will. The philosophies of the East were too abstract and too far removed from the facts of daily life. Indeed, to the highest Eastern thought this life had no reality. It was mere illusion, a hindrance to true vision, a passing dream. To the deep thinkers of Rome the evils of the world appeared so inherent, and the corruption of society so deep-seated, that a Stoic fatalism seemed the only attitude with which to face the painful duties of life. The idolatries which were maintained under the shadow of the Roman Empire were mostly artificial, and depended for their continuance upon political and social needs rather than upon any religious belief. While they fostered hypocrisy and unreality, they gave shelter to many immoralities, and contributed largely to the hopeless corruption of national and social life. Religion had lost its elevating power. Life without religion was proving itself intolerable and despairing. Man apart from God was realising his weakness, when Jesus came to knit man close to God by the Incarnation.

It was thus that God willed to redeem us from the corruption and the hopelessness of life, to dignify our surroundings as the very sphere of Divine revelation, and to enrich all our powers by the gift of Divine fellowship. It was the transfiguration of human life. From the coming of Christ the world dates a new era. Hope, freedom, strength, and happiness have renewed the face of the world. All the great movements that have tended towards social amelioration, scientific progress, and the increase of individual happiness, owe their first and their enduring impulse to the Spirit of Christ.

We see that this is true in the history of nations as a whole, and in the general progress of the world. We know that it is true in our own lives. Life for us takes on new interest, new power, new usefulness, as it is touched with the Presence of Christ. The lowly things of life are the scene of God's manifestation. The simplest duties become the sphere of Divine activity. The weakest powers of human life, submitted to the consecration of God and rendered up to Him for His acceptance, become powerful instruments of useful service, achieving the Divine Will in ways of unexpected happiness. The Divine strength is made perfect in human weakness. Life becomes a progress from strength to strength. Christ manifests forth His glory and we

believe on Him, moving forward from faith to faith as we give ourselves increasingly to His discipleship.

For we know that the life of man is the glory of God. And our hope is that in us God may be glorified. Here in this world that glory will begin; here in this world we pray that it may grow in beauty and in power. In Paradise our lives will be wrought into fuller obedience to the Divine Will, and into closer fellowship with Jesus. Heaven will be the final achievement of the Divine purpose in man. Human life, disciplined by the restraints and lowly obedience of this world, irradiated by the veiled glory of Christ's sacramental Presence, purified by the cleansing ministries of the Holy Spirit, will at length attain to that glory of God for which it was made, that glory which is not only for us the consummation of bliss both of body and soul, but also the revelation before God and the angels of the Divine Majesty and Love, into the fellowship of which we have entered through the Incarnation.

Thus it is that we all with unveiled face, reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit.

Pray that we may manifest the glory of God in our lives.

O Blessed Jesu, Brightness of the glory of God the Father, and express Image of His Person, Who

hast been pleased to dwell with us upon earth, inspire us with Thy purity, strengthen us with Thy might, and so mould and fashion us to Thy Holy Will, that our lives being filled with the beauty of Thy Presence we may manifest Thy glory to the world in the power of the Spirit, Who with Thee and the eternal Father liveth and reigneth, one God, for ever and ever.

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